SIGNORA

"Signora and Planky were great chums"

SIGNORA

A CHILD OF THE OPERA HOUSE

BY

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I

S you probably never have heard of Yudels, you doubtless will be surprised to learn that to have given opera without him would have been quite impossible.

If, just as the curtain was about to ring up, one of the Queen's ancient-looking ladies in waiting (fresh from a supper of spaghetti and garlic) clutched at the back of her head with a despairing gesture which signified that her coiffure was tottering on its throne, there was Yudels at hand with a hairpin or comb produced from the depths of his coat pocket.

Yudels had been a chorus singer—one of the "Signori del Coro"—whose duty it was to stand straight in line half way up the stage and with machine-like precision and a total lack of facial expression, ejaculate in

Italian, "I tremble!" while the tenor pranced up and down in front of them, vowing to run his sword through his own body if the prima donna should happen to prefer the baritone. Now he was a general utility man behind the scenes. The hairpin and comb, for the benefit of the distressed "chorus lady," were mere hints as to the possibilities of his coat pocket. It seemed as if all the many small articles needed in an emergency behind the scenes had been caught up in a whirlpool and ultimately deposited in its depths.

It might chance that during a "Faust" performance, as the tenor was about to "go on" to sing the famous *Salve di Mora*, one of his moustachios suddenly became loosened and drooped limp and disconsolate over the lips which were to breathe forth the tender romanza. Even so guileless a girl as Marguerite would know that moustachios are not intended to grow in different directions and would find it ridiculous. An agonized look toward Yudels from the tenor—perhaps it was his début in the

rôle—and Yudels was hurrying in the direction of the "prompt entrance," his hand delving in that marvellous pocket from which, even as he ran, it produced a bottle of spirit gum with which the dangling bit of hirsuterie was promptly affixed to its proper base—and the evening was saved.

Or they were giving one of the music-dramas from "His Nibs of the Ringelungen," as Yudels called them, with the contempt a chorus singer of Italian opera feels for Wagner; and the prima donna complained of sudden huskiness after the first act, and wanted the intermission prolonged—and that in a performance which, at its best, would not be over until after midnight. In a few minutes Yudels would be at her dressing-room door, in his hand a glass containing the white of an egg and the juice of a lemon, and soon afterwards the prima donna would announce that the performance might proceed.

Just about this time the staff physician of the opera house, a distinguished and highly feed specialist, would appear upon the

scene. For the benefit of this specialist there was kept in the box office a surgical chest with splints and bandages and antiseptics enough to last through a military campaign. This surgical outfit had never been used but once, when a chorus singer broke his leg "from falling over his own feet," as Yudels kindly observed. Summoned behind the scenes to the prima donna, the physician would present himself in her dressing-room with a throat sprayer and a bottle of solution ready to spray Madame's larynx, pharynx, epiglottis and other things with scientific names. After a pleasant chat—the prima donna no longer requiring his services, since Yudels had been there—he would return to the "front of the house" and despatch an usher to deposit the sprayer and solution in a closet in the box office where they were kept, conveniently distant from the very spot where they were most needed.

Every opera in the company's repertoire, no matter in what language it was given, Yudels knew from memory, inside out,

upside down, wrong end foremost. As what might be called an impromptu prompter, no one could hold a "bunch" light to him. It sometimes happened that a singer was so far "up stage" he could not catch the prompter's voice from the turtle-back in front of the conductor's desk. His eye would wander wildly about in search of the assistant prompter who should have been in the wings nearby, but happened at that moment to have climbed up a ladder with the prima donna, who had to make her entrance on a balcony or a mountain peak and wanted him to give her her cue. In this crisis Yudels would crawl out behind a canvas tree or fountain or some other "set piece" to within hearing distance of the embarrassed singer and whisper his "Risotto Milanese! Spaghetti Parmesan! Paté de Clam! Soup à la Reine!" or "Nix komm heraus aus de Deutschmann's Haus!" —according as the opera was Italian, French or German. (You observe I am quoting from memory. Yudels did it better.)

Yet in spite of Yudels' complete familiarity

with the company's repertoire, no one—from the $1750 a night Carmen or Romeo, to the fifty cent boy who played the front legs of the "Siegfried" dragon—remembered having seen him take part in an operatic performance.

There was a tradition behind the scenes that Yudels had been not only a chorus singer, but a chorus singer fired with ambition. He did not indeed aspire to be a Faust, Romeo, Raoul or Edgardo. To a certain extent he knew his own limitations. He was quite aware that never would there be posted up in the lobby a notice to the effect that "owing to the sudden indisposition of Signor Yudels, Signor Vermicelli has been substituted in the *rôle* of ——. Ticket holders wishing to have their money refunded are requested to apply to the box office." In his weirdest aspirations Yudels never dreamed of people asking to have their money refunded because he was not to sing. No—Yudels' yearnings were limited.

In every opera there are minor solo *rôles*

like Ruiz, Manrico's servitor in "Trovatore," who enters with Lenora, "enveloped in cloaks," and sings four lines, "in an undertone." Ruiz would have satisfied Yudels' ambition even with the "undertone." As for the Messaggiero in "Aida," the messenger who tells in a few brief lines, but with graphic gesticulation (in the course of which the bow with which he is armed can be waved wildly and with great effect) how the Egyptian army has been routed by the hosts of Amonasro—could Yudels have been cast for that *rôle*, he would have felt as if he were a notable figure in the musical world and would pass into history. It opened up vistas—especially the waving of the bow—which stirred his ambition and thrilled his soul.

Alas poor Yudels! Not even that was to crown his career. Neither chorus master, orchestral leader, nor impressario recognized the greatness that was mutely appealing to them, and was going to waste in their midst, so to speak. And so it was that, when the management wanted a general

utility man to look after odds and ends which it seemed no one else's business to attend to, Yudels—his hopes blasted—applied for the position. Getting it, he promptly resigned from the chorus—gave up the privilege of looking like an Italian barber in a Scotch kilt in "Lucia"; of being a conspirator, an assassin, a courtier, a fisherman or a warrior; and of standing in line and exclaiming "what horror!" whenever the love-smitten and persecuted heroine looked as if she were going to have cramps.

II

AMONG other odds and ends which, as occasion demanded, fell within Yudels' sphere of duty was now and then to relieve the stage door-keeper. He tried to arrange this duty for Wagner nights. He hated Wagner, and the stage door was about as far away from the stage as he could get. Moreover, the noise from the street sometimes, as Yudels put it, "drowned the noise on the stage."

There was no reconciling the old chorus singer to the prophet of Bayreuth. When asked, for instance, if he did not appreciate the depth and beauty of the love scene between Sigemund and Sieglande in the first act of "Die Walküre," he exclaimed: "Love scene!—they sound like two dogs barking at each other." Wagner required

serpents, dragons, magic fire, maidens on winged steeds coursing through the clouds; the good old-fashioned operatic composers asked only for some one who could sing. That was Yudels' staple argument. Nothing any one could say about deeply moving dramatic plots that underlay the Wagner music-dramas, of the wondrous woof of leading motives, and the marvellous welding of music and drama, moved him. He merely shrugged his shoulders and asked "bel canto?" and answered his own question with an emphatic "non!" To show his utter contempt for the supposed arch enemy of bel canto, he even had devised a joke. Sometimes, when the orchestra was tuning up, when fiddles were scraping, flutes screeching, clarinets wailing, bassoons squawking, double basses growling, and trombones grunting, Yudels would say: "Ah! we have Wagner to-night. I hear the overture." Small wonder he chose Wagner nights for his "trick" at the stage door.

Have you ever seen a stage entrance or

tried to conjure it up in your imagination as you recline in the luxuriously upholstered chairs of the opera house? The scene before you is so brilliant you hardly can believe it stops short with the dimensions of the stage—with what the eye beholds—but are convinced it must extend far beyond. Everything is life and action. The glitter fires your imagination. Surely the various characters, as they make their exits from the stage before your eyes, pass through long colonnades of marble to suites of regal apartments. The scene looks so real that in your fancy the palace spreads throughout all the space behind the scenes and the stage door must be the gilded gate through which it is entered from the outer world.

But alas! all is dross. Step behind one of those columns and you will see a strip of unpainted canvas mounted on wooden framing. Off the stage "grips" in white overalls and noiseless felt slippers are shoving about trees, parts of houses, precipices, and other varieties of the handiwork of nature

and man, so as to be able quickly to set the next scene. Doublet and hose do not make the Polish tenor, who is languishing in the garden of the Capulets, the real lover of Verona; nor does a sixteenth-century gown change the prima donna at the casement into a real Juliet. And the exquisite cool, blue moonlight that softly enfolds the lovers? The chief electrician simply has ordered his assistant at the switchboard, which controls all the lights in the house, to "work in his blues in the 'borders'." Nor will the ill-fated lovers really kill themselves in the tomb of the Capulets. The curtain will not be down a second before Romeo, who has swallowed deadly poison, and Juliet, who has pierced her heart with Romeo's dagger, will spring to their feet to hasten before the footlights and acknowledge with innumerable smiles and bows the applause of the audience.

It is all unreal—all the glitter and splendor of it, all the comedy and tragedy. The gilded palace gate of the imagination was never there; and if ever there was a prosaic

entrance to a realm of fancy, it is the stage door.

Generally it is a mere slit in the wall without a step leading up or down to it, but opening right on a level with the street so that whoever enters seems at once swallowed up by the "house." It is narrow because part of the passageway into which it leads is taken up with a cubby-hole in which sits the theatrical Cerberus, peering through a small pane of glass. Sometimes he doesn't sit there but tilts back his chair at an acute angle against the wall of the passageway and drawing up his legs so that his heels rest on a rung of the chair, gazes with an air of complete abstraction at the opposite wall. This until he hears some one approaching from without, when he scowls. For the stage-doorkeeper regards every one as an enemy until proved to be a friend. Even the original Cerberus probably did not keep so strict a watch as his theatrical successor. It is conceivable that the mythological monster may at times have allowed his three heads to fall asleep—even three heads may become

weary—and have permitted an occasional guileless soul, that had no business at all snooping around Hades, to slip past. But a theatrical Cerberus never is guilty of such laches. With his one head he can look as fierce and growl as loudly as his mythological prototype did with three. Unless you are a member of the company or have a pass from the manager, you stay out in the street.

But the stage door of an opera house is somewhat more elaborate. A $1750 a night voice has to be carefully guarded. Draughts must be excluded as much as possible. An opera company is a large organization and from half past six, when the prima donnas, who like to take plenty of time over their coiffures and costumes, begin to arrive, until the performance begins, there is a constant opening and shutting of the stage door. It never would do to have the cold blasts of a winter night sweep staccato through the labyrinth of passageways. For it is marvellous how delicate a prima donna's voice becomes after she has made her success. Early in her career she may have been glad,

as was a now famous prima donna, to secure a winter engagement at some small Italian opera house, where her dressing-room was so cold she was obliged to carry a brazier of charcoal from her lodgings to the theatre in order to keep warm during waits. But success once achieved—once in the front rank of singers—a prima donna's voice becomes the most delicate thing in the world (as well as her disposition one of the most curious). For this reason, the stage door at the opera house is not reached directly from the street. A short flight of iron steps leads up to it and a storm door is built over the stoop, forming a little vestibule, and serving to keep out the gusts.

One winter night, very cold and blustering, Yudels was keeping the stage door. Having grown tired sitting in his cubby hole, he had emerged and planted his chair against the wall—of course with the familiar tilt and heel rest of all stage-doorkeepers. Yudels was smoking. On the wall just above his head was printed in four languages—English, Italian, French, and German—"Smok-

ing Strictly Prohibited." To professional smokers in the troupe it was like Dante's warning to the souls approaching the Inferno:

"Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch entreate"—"All hope abandon, ye who enter here,"—which for the smoker may be freely translated: "All 'weeds' abandon, ye who enter here!"

Yet Yudels was smoking. The big building was full of inflammable material. Nothing seems to burn as fast as a theatre. Stage palaces, stage forests, even stage rocks blaze up like kindling wood. A spark might imperil a thousand lives. Yet Yudels was having a smoke!—but it was a "cold" smoke.

It was, however, just like Yudels to endeavor to extract as much pleasure out of his cigar as if it were lighted. Taking it between two short, fat fingers (Yudels was a regular roly-poly), leaning back his head as far as the slant of the chair would permit, he would close his eyes and take a long pull at the cold weed. Then he would remove it from between his lips, purse them as if

he were emitting rings of smoke and open his eyes to follow with an expression of complete beatitude the upward course of the wreaths of bluish vapor, which existed only in his imagination.

The smoker, who has no poetry in his soul, does not know what smoking is. He has remained untouched by its highest ecstasies. The smoker with a soul sees the smoke, as it wreathes upward, assume the shapes of his ideals—the painter, trees, clouds, the sea; the poet, a beautiful face; while the musician hears trembling chords too delicate and too intermingled to fix themselves with definition upon the most sensitive ear. To Yudels, however, the imaginary wreaths, as he followed them with his eyes until they vanished in the shadows beyond the rays of the electric lamp, had a definite meaning. Always, after turning and twisting like cloud shapes on a windy day, they streaked themselves out into forms strangely like musical notes, and always the notes of those minor operatic *rôles* he had so longed to be heard in. For the nonce

he was lost in dreams of greatness he was never destined to achieve. There he sat dreaming, dreaming, dreaming. Then footsteps outside—and the rude awakening to reality.

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It was about seven o'clock. Most of the principals were already in their dressing-rooms. The small fry had not yet begun to arrive. Yudels had found time for one of his dreams of disappointed ambition. He was leaning back, his cigar, with its soft, munched end between his fingers, abstractedly gazing upwards. Then he heard the storm-door open and fixed his eyes on the stage door ready to pass or challenge the arrival. Suddenly in the vestibule there was a low growl, followed by short, sharp barking. Yudels didn't stir—he knew just what was happening. An accomplishment on which the Polish tenor, one of the most famous artists of the day, prided himself, was his perfect mimicry of animal sounds. Once before with his barking, he had caused Yudels to hurry out into the vestibule; and

again by meowing like a cat. But he could not deceive the old chorus singer a third time. Finally, the barking stopped, the door opened and the great tenor, who usually had a friendly word for Yudels, strode past him with the merest nod. The great artist was piqued. He set much store by his powers of imitating animal sounds and his artistic *amour propre* was hurt that his ruse had not succeeded. Had Yudels run out to chase away the dog, the tenor would have been in good spirits all the evening. Yudels found grim enjoyment in this episode. He might be only an ex-chorus singer, who had been refused the satisfaction of singing a few minor *rôles*, but he succeeded in keeping a great tenor barking in a storm enclosure of a winter night. If he was a failure, so was the tenor.

For a few moments there was no interruption and Yudels was again about relapsing into dreamland. But he heard light footsteps, evidently a woman's, outside, and the opening of the storm door. It remained open an unusual length of time—long enough

for a gust of wind to sweep around the storm enclosure and make the stage-door vibrate. Then the storm-door was closed, but no one entered the opera house. Instead, Yudels heard the light footsteps descend to the street. Some one had entered the storm enclosure, lingered there a few moments and then gone. What had that person wanted there? Whoever it had been was out of sight. Yet a sudden impulse prompted Yudels to unperch his heels, bring his chair down with a smart bang, rise to his feet and start towards the stage door with the intention of looking into the street. But he got no further than the stage door. For when he opened it, he saw right at his feet, a small bundle carefully done up in a gray shawl.

Yudels could never explain just why he suppressed his first impulse to toss the bundle into the street; or why, when he decided to bring it in, instead of grabbing one end and dragging it in after him, he slid both hands under it, carried it carefully into the passageway with him and seating himself, this time with all four legs of the chair

resting on the ground, laid it carefully across his lap. Then he felt at it gingerly with his hands. There was something beneath the soft folds of the shawl, but just what he could not tell. The better to open the bundle, he got out of the chair, laid the bundle on the seat and, kneeling on the floor before it, began undoing the ends which were fastened up with safety pins. Yudels being a man, knew nothing about the art of doing up bundles, but this one seemed to him to be done up with great, in fact, with almost loving care. Every fold was creased and even.

He threw back the ends, the sides, and there remained only two overlapping layers of shawl. These he cautiously lifted and drew aside. Before his astonished eyes lay a sweet, clean, pure, girl baby, its head a little turned to one side, its thumb in its mouth, and sound asleep.

I will not assert that Yudels had never seen a baby. Few persons can claim such distinction or such immunity. Certain it is, however, Yudels had never been in such

proximity to one as at that moment. Naturally he was slightly flustered, for although Yudels had made himself useful in innumerable capacities, he never yet had figured as an infant's nurse, let alone a mother. Had the wee girl, with whom he had been so suddenly confronted, awakened at that moment and set up a howl, he must certainly have retired precipitately. But she looked so soft and pretty and at the same time so helpless, that his first surprise, not to say alarm, changed to pity, and he looked tenderly down at the little creature that had been left in his charge so unceremoniously.

Even while he was looking, the baby turned her head, and the next thing Yudels saw two large brown eyes were gazing up at him. She did not seem in the least afraid of him and in a moment was smiling at him in the most confiding manner. Just about that time Yudels felt a little warm hand closing around his chunky thumb. It was as if the child realized it had been deserted and was clinging to him for protection. At that moment all the bitterness of disappointment

was swept out of Yudel's nature. He even forgot about *Ruiz* and the *Messagiero.* Was not here a little messagiero sent to him as if from heaven? A feeling of infinite tenderness took possession of him. He felt like taking up the child in his arms and devouring her with kisses. Who knows but that he would have done so had not the little fingers relaxed, the eyes closed and the smile grown fainter as the baby again drifted over the river of sleep toward the island of dreams.

III

UDELS lifted the burden, chair and all, into his cubby hole. Then he seated himself on one of the arms of the chair and looked down at the face of the little sleeper.

Something new, something strange, yet something sweet and delightful had crept into his life, and then and there he made up his mind that never should it creep out again. Hardly ten minutes had passed since he had first laid eyes on the baby, yet he felt as strong a claim of proprietorship in her as if she had been his own. Marvellous power of babyhood! Weak and impotent to defend itself, what, more than a babe, would seem the world's prey? Yet its very weakness inspires the pity and its very helplessness

the love, which are its strength and make the world its champion. There lay Yudels' baby girl—its lips, its eyelids, trembling ever and anon like rose leaves kissed by a zephyr. Asleep she had been deserted; she had awakened and her eyes had rested on a new protector and she had promptly fallen asleep again. Which is the more blessed—a baby or the way it sleeps?

Yudels paced up and down the hall—probably the first time a stage doorkeeper was ever known not to be in his chair and in the position established by tradition. But Yudels was satisfied, for the baby had the chair, and where babies are concerned all others yield gracefully.

Again there were footsteps without. The storm door and the stage door were opened and a woman chorus singer entered. She stood in mute surprise when she saw Yudels, a stage doorkeeper, standing up. Her expression changed to amazement when he quickly raised a finger to his lips with a warning "pst, pst!" while he tiptoed toward her and, reaching her, laid a restraining

hand on her arm as if to caution her against making a sound. Then he led her gently to the cubby hole and showed her the baby asleep on a chair.

She was a kindly old soul—most chorus women are old, but all are not kindly—so she leaned over the wee morsel and kissed her. "Cara bambina! povera bambinaccia!" she gently murmured as she gazed at her tenderly. Then she walked pianissimo, on tiptoe—as if afraid of wakening the child—down the passageway and disappeared through the iron door which leads to the main part of the opera house. This little scene was repeated with variations by every fresh arrival.

By and by the stage door remained closed. The whole company had arrived. There were certain sounds—carriage wheels driving up, muffled orders from the stage, where the "grips" were putting the last pieces of "scenery" into place, and the faint squeaking and squawking of the orchestra which was tuning up—by which Yudels knew that the performance was about to begin. Then

"The great French prima donna, who, as Carmen, had no rival"

he heard the crisp, dapper, little march with which the opera begins—they were giving "Carmen"—and then the chorus, then the action on the stage and the gust of applause which greeted the great French prima donna, who as Carmen had no rival. "Amour Mysterieuse," she was singing the famous "Habanera," as no one else could;—and so Yudels followed the first act; for although most of the music did not penetrate as far as the passage to the stage door, he was so familiar with it, that what he did not actually hear, he heard in his imagination. Moreover, he was such an old hand at opera that he could feel something magnetic in the air which told him that the performance was passing off with more than usual snap and dash.

Ordinarily, he would have been vastly annoyed to be obliged to keep the door on "Carmen" night, especially when the Carmen was unusually tricky and devilish. For he adored the opera, and the French prima donna was one of his greatest divinities and, anyhow, he did not want this duty

except on Wagner night. But the baby! As he watched her, he felt that a special providence had assigned him to the stage door that night.

Evidently the story of Yudels and the baby was passed around behind the scenes. For after the first act, a white-clad, felt-slippered "grip" came to Yudels with a message that the prima donna would like to see the baby in her dressing-room and would "Signor Yudels be so very kind as to bring her?" "Signor" Yudels would. Who wouldn't obey such an invitation from the tyrant of the operatic world, the prima donna?

The baby still was sleeping when he took her, nor did the hubbub on the stage, as he crossed it, awaken her. In the middle of the "first entrance" and with his back almost against the curtain, stood the stage manager shouting stage directions, occasionally emphasizing them by clapping his hands. "Lower that drop a little more. Bring those benches further down. What's that orange tree doing over there? This ain't no roof garden. Shove that old swan into

a corner; we're not giving 'Lohengrin.' Can't you give 'em more light up in the flies?" Meanwhile the grips, clad in white jumpers and slippered like the one who had brought the prima donna's message to Yudels, were running noiselessly hither and thither, shifting on the side wall of the tavern of Lillas-Pastia, and shoving off sections of the bridge over which Carmen had made her appearance in the first act, while there was creaking of pulleys above as a considerable portion of the city of Seville was raised skywards by the "hands" in the fly galleries, three or four of them to a rope, like the crew of a merchantman hauling in the mainsheet, without the familiar "Hoy-ee-oy." All seemed confusion. But the initiated knew that everything was proceeding along the regular lines. They were "striking" one scene and setting another and would be ready on time. Some Spanish smugglers and gypsies were strolling across the stage without fear of colliding with the departing town or coming tavern. They eyed Yudels interestedly as he crossed

over toward the door or rather the stage door of the prima donna's dressing-room. For there were two doors to this room which was never occupied by any one save by *the* prima donna of the evening. There might be two or three prima donnas in one performance—as in "Don Giovanni." But the one who had that dressing-room, was *the* one who headed the list—and the salary list as well—the queen of them all.

The two doors were a tribute to this fact. One of them led to the hall on which all the other dressing-rooms on the same floor opened, the other directly on the stage. Yet it looked like anything but the entrance to a diva's room. It was a prosaic gap in the brick wall reaching as high as the first fly gallery, and bare save for scenery that was piled against it, some of it with the painted side out, trees, cliffs, dungeons, palaces—some showing only the framing and bare canvas of the back.

There were three short steps to the door. On one side stood a set of shelves full of hammers, gimlets, screwdrivers, nails,

screws, staples—anything that might be needed for effecting immediate repairs. In the corner between the steps and wall on the other side were some spears, arquebuses, swords and other weapons and a pile of helmets placed on the floor, all left there temporarily before being taken upstairs and put away in the armory. From the aspect of these surroundings one expected to enter a lumber room instead of a prima donna's dressing-room. Nor was the scene on entering like that which a song queen's fervent admirers, who had seen her in all her glory on the stage, would imagine.

There was nothing on the walls save a mirror and some hooks. A lounge, a few chairs, and a small table in front of the mirror, made up the furniture. There was no suggestion of luxury, hardly of comfort. At the table in front of the mirror and in full glare of the electric lamps, which made the plainness of the room all the more apparent, sat the great prima donna—a Carmen with a grey shawl thrown over her shoulders to guard against draughts, while her maid

was touching up her eyebrows with a stick of grease paint.

The great singer had evidently sent out a general alarm that the baby was coming. For waiting in her dressing-room were—the Polish tenor, who was the Don Jose of the evening; his brother, who was a famous basso; and a German mezzo, who, although she sang forbidding *rôles* like "Ortrud," had been married three times and was the mother of eight children, to whom she was devotedly attached. It was she who had described opera as "dee exciting life!" adding, "First you sing Wagner, den you have a baby. Den you sing Wagner again, und den you have annuder baby, and so eet goes. Oh, eet ees dee exciting life!" One of her children was born in this country and bore the name of George Washington Mannheim-Weink, yet had managed to survive and was enjoying good health. Neither basso nor mezzo were in the night's performance, but like moths around the flame, they could not keep away from the opera house.

A little later in came the Escamillo, a little

Italian baritone, an excellent and useful artist, whose capabilities ranged from the Toreador in "Carmen," to comic *rôles* like Figaro in the "Barber of Seville." When you saw him approaching, you never were sure whether he was going to wave a red sash at you, as though you were a bull, and shout "Toreador, attentio!" or suddenly break into mincing steps and spout, "Figaro! Figaro!" On ordinary occasions, when he was not on the stage and in costume, he was a fierce-looking little individual. He owed this fierce appearance chiefly to his bristling moustachios, which were not unlike a prickly hedge. Altogether, he seemed like the last person in the world to ask to see a baby, but really he was quite harmless. He had a perfect passion for macaroni—so intense that he kept in his dressing-room a small hand machine for manufacturing it, and a spirit lamp and pot for cooking it—apparatus which he carried with him when the company went on tour. A jar of grated parmesan cheese also belonged to the outfit. Yudels would have

liked to deposit the baby in the German mezzo's arms. He was confident from her experience with "dee exciting life" that she would not drop it. But the prima donna was there and with true operatic instinct, he placed the burden in her lap. The prima donna was a very beautiful woman, but of the *beauté de diable* type. Yet as she inclined her head over the baby, the group of singers meanwhile closing around her, a look of real tenderness came into those eyes that usually flashed with the fire of unbridled passion or hatred.

There were a few moments of absorbed silence. Then the German mezzo asked Yudels this practical question:—"Vat are you going to geeve her to eat?" At this, the little Italian baritone began smoothing down the bristles of his moustachios so as to make himself look as affable as possible and took a step forward with the air of one who is trying to look pleasant because about to give important advice which he desires to have received with favor. Just at that moment, however, the giant basso—who knew

nothing at all about babies—suggested koumiss, adding, "You know it already has been digested."

"By whom?" asked the little Italian baritone fiercely, his moustachios bristling up again. "By whom has it been digested?" and he allowed a ferocious look to travel from one to the other, until it rested upon the offending basso, who, as good-natured as he was big, looked slightly alarmed. Receiving no answer the baritone smoothed down his bristles again, and, having resumed a more affable appearance, said in his most pleasant manner: "There is nothing that can be better for her than macaroni," and then withdrew to his dressing-room to manufacture some, happy in the thought that he had had the grace, the self-sacrificing spirit to throw off his fierce appearance, on which, like most small men, he greatly prided himself, in the combined cause of the baby and macaroni.

A few minutes later and the baby opened her eyes, and seeing the beautiful face inclined over her, broke into the sweetest

imaginable smile. Thereupon, every one in the room smiled in sympathy. The German prima donna's smile was most expansive and maternal—it had beamed thousands of times upon eight of her own. As for the big tenor and basso, "Jean" and "Edouard," they stood side by side, each with a hand resting fondly on the other's shoulder, with heads slightly cocked up, eyes raised heavenward, and lips wearing a seraphic expression, so that the two great singers looked like Raphael's cherubs, full length and grown up.

Suddenly, however, this blissful state of affairs was rudely interrupted. The baby slightly raised herself, screwed up her face until her eyes almost closed, her forehead wrinkled, and the tip of her nose threatened to come in contact with her upper lip. Then every feature quivered—and she sneezed. Universal consternation! The prima donna hastily drew the baby's shawl closer, and, reaching down, gathered up the crimson skirt of Carmen's first act costume and threw it over the child. Basso and

"Jean"

tenor, just like men, just looked alarmed. The German prima donna had the presence of mind to touch a button which rang a bell in the box office, and when the answer came, to call through the tube: "Send dee doctor, not dee young doctor who saws dee bones out of dee noses. Dee old doctor!"

An irreverent call boy, who from the door had been watching the proceedings, surreptitiously scribbled something on a piece of paper, pinned it to the lintel, gave a leer, and scooted. This is what he had written: "Owing to the sudden indisposition of Signora——who has caught a sudden cold, she will not be able to sing this evening. Persons wishing to have their money refunded may apply to the box office."

Don Jose put his hand to his sabre hilt, as if he would like to pursue the boy and kill him, the basso raised his hand in majestic wrath, the mezzo scowled more darkly than she ever had as Ortrud, while Carmen sighed impatiently.

"Dee old doctor," for whom they had sent, was not the famous specialist, but

another physician on the opera-house staff. The famous specialist had a mania for removing part of the nasal bone at the slightest provocation. Early in his career he made up his mind that to succeed, a physician must be different from other physicians. No matter what, he must do something to impress the patient. If a singer came to consult him, should he simply spray and douche him? By no means. Other physicians could do that. But discover an enlargement of the nasal bone and inform the patient it would be necessary to partly remove it! People like nothing better than to feel that there is something serious the matter with them—so long as it does not hurt—or to talk about some operation they have undergone. Of course, the young specialist soon became famous and built up an enormous practice. It is true some people would have preferred to have kept their bones—even their nasal ones—intact. But that made no difference. He was a famous specialist, and if you went to him you left a part of your nose behind you before you

were allowed to depart. Was it a wonder, therefore, that when the baby sneezed the elder physician of the opera-house staff was sent for? True, he was not quite so famous; but, then, he could cure a cold without sawing off part of your nasal bone.

The physician was not long in coming. He had been preceded by the manager—a small man, quick in his motions, with restless eyes, and a worried expression as if he were thinking of the repertoire a month ahead—trying to avoid giving "Faust" three times and "Carmen" once one week and "Faust" once and "Carmen" three times the next. When he heard that the physician had been summoned he had hastened behind the scenes with forebodings of a sudden change in the cast being necessitated. Seeing it was only a baby he was too relieved to be surprised.

The physician heard the alarming occurrence described in several languages simultaneously. He smiled, looked at the baby and said: "There is nothing the matter with her."

"Nothing the matter with her!" they exclaimed. "But she sneezed!"

"She is perfectly well," the physician repeated.

"But when we sneeze," said the prima donna, who was the first to recover from her astonishment, "we are very ill. We are sprayed and cauterized and done up in cotton wool."

"True. When *you* sneeze you *are* very ill and the audience steps up to the box office and demands its money back. But *she* is not."

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the tenor and the basso in unison. "Dio mio!" echoed some Italian chorus singers who had gathered in the hall. "Mein Gott!" cried the German mezzo in a voice like a church organ. The prima donna still looked incredulous, while the Polish tenor took down from the door the notice the mischievous call boy had pinned up and carefully put the pin in the cushion. (Opera singers are either recklessly extravagant or proverbially

frugal.) "I predict she will never disappoint an audience," he prophesied.

The manager had said nothing up to this point. "Not ill when she sneezes?" he asked. "No postponements? No money paid back? I will engage her at once."

"Now that you have engaged her, what name will you put on the programme?" asked the practical German mezzo.

The manager shrugged his shoulders, then he picked up the notice the tenor had taken down.

"It is 'Signora——' How shall we fill the blank?"

"Don't fill it out at all," protested the prima donna. "She has come to us without any name. Leave it blank. Let us just call her 'Signora.' She is *the* Signora. It is very pretty."

Whether it was that the baby grew tired of the light or suddenly realized that it was surrounded by strange faces, it pursed up its little lips, screwed up its wee nose, twittered its eyelids, and began to cry.

"Shall we send for the doctor again?" asked the basso.

"Perhaps she would like to have me bark," suggested the great tenor. "Or do you think she would be more pleased if I meowed?"

But the prima donna on whose lap she lay, closed her arms around her, began swaying gently to and fro and started up the pretty French lullaby—"Dors, Dors mon Enfant."

The previous week she had declined an offer of a thousand dollars to sing that very lullaby and a few other songs at a private house.

Suddenly a new strain was added to the song. The basso, who was a brother of the tenor and as great an artist—and physically even a little broader and taller, a giant among men as among singers—had like his brother a fad. He was capital at imitating the sounds of various instruments, at the same time assuming the player's pose. No sooner had the prima donna begun the lullaby, then he squared himself off, seemed to

place an imaginary 'cello between his knees and to draw a bow over the imaginary strings with the graceful wrist movement of an accomplished 'cellist. From his lips, meanwhile, there issued a lovely 'cello obligato, a strain which harmonized perfectly with the lullaby and infinitely added to its beauty. He kept it on the high notes with a weird effect, like that of the chirping of a myriad of insects in a forest of a warm summer night. This was a signal for all; and soon the Polish tenor, the German mezzo and the other artists in the room had added their voices to the prima donna's—softly, of course, so that they produced a marvellously rich pianissimo effect.

The little Italian baritone entered with a grin and a plate of steaming hot macaroni. A glance and he deposited the plate on a table and joined with the rest.

The call boy was going along the row of dressing-rooms above, shouting: "Ten minutes! Ten minutes! Ten minutes!" at each door, giving that much warning to prepare for the curtain. He could be heard

half running, half sliding downstairs. But when he poked his head in at the prima donna's door, the call died on his lips and he viewed the scene and listened in amazement.

What a wonderful proceeding in this little box of a dressing-room! Here were the greatest singers of their time—artists of genius—doing, as a matter of course, for a wee baby girl, what others would have had to pay a fortune for. In fact, the manager, who had been looking on silently but interestedly, had figured out that it would have cost him fifteen thousand dollars to have put that baby to sleep.

"May I have my Signora now?" asked Yudels at last. Gently the prima donna deposited the wee girl in his arms and kissed her; and, through a lane of opera singers, who in a few moments would be swaying a great audience, the calmly sleeping baby was carried out.

"Here were some of the greatest singers of their time doing, as a matter of course, for a wee baby girl what others would have had to pay a fortune for"

IV

ISN'T it wonderful how rapidly news travels? It seems as if each air particle took it up and passed it on until the whole atmosphere is permeated with it.

Only a few minutes had passed since the prima donna in her dressing-room had suggested calling the baby Signora. Yet as Yudels bore her across the stage, the stage manager raised his hand to check the men at work, as if he feared they might awaken the baby, and in a stage whisper called out, "Signora!" There was a sudden hush. The entrance to the Plaza del Toro, which was being shoved off, suddenly became stationary near the orange stand. Two houses of the city of Seviglia, remained dangling in mid-air, like long, loosely jointed legs. The moment Yudels had crossed the stage,

work was resumed. The entrance was pushed up against the wall and the houses disappeared amid the borders. Signora was out of hearing. All was well. Yudels carried back the baby to the basket in the cubby hole and, tipping back on his chair, fell to thinking what a blessed little companion he would have in his abode under the roof of the opera house.

Probably no queerer dwelling than his was to be found. Its approaches were more difficult than those of a mediæval castle. Two long flights of stairs brought you to the second fly gallery. From there an iron ladder led to the third, and from there another iron ladder to the fourth which was about as high again above the stage as the proscenium arch. Reaching across from here to the other side of the house was the "gridiron," the net work of iron girders, wheels and drums, over which passed the innumerable ropes for hoisting the scenes which were handled by the men on the first fly gallery. Here too, was the "rabbit hutch," an arrangement of sloping shelves

from which, when a prolonged peal of thunder was required, cannon balls were dropped into a long zinc-lined trough, down which they rolled with many reverberations. Right alongside the "rabbit hutch" was the narrow iron door which led to Yudels' apartment—two little rooms and a kitchen. To that solitary height he climbed every night, sometimes pausing at the rail to look into the depths of darkness beneath, where, but a short time before everything had been flooded with light. With the curtain down, the stage was so absolutely shut off from the rest of the world that it seemed as if a chunk of darkness, just large enough to fill the space from floor to gridiron, had been carved out of the night and set down in the opera house. The faintest ray, just enough to guide him like a star during his long climb, issued through the keyhole of the door of his apartment; also it gave just enough light to enable him to see the darkness and make its vastness more impressive.

As Yudels was sitting near the stage entrance, he suddenly began asking himself

how would he ever get Signora safely up to his eyrie. It would be nothing to carry her up the two flights of stairs, however long and steep they were, but the two iron ladders—they would require skill. Could he go up with her in one arm while the hand of the other grasped the rungs; should he attempt to carry her on his back; or, had she best be lashed fast to him?

He was ruminating over these various aspects, when certain sounds told him that the performance was over. He heard a gust of applause, then a shuffling of feet up the stairways, and overhead the chorus hurrying to their dressing-rooms—a shoving of objects about the stage—the "striking" of the scene and gathering up of "props"—and carriage calls on the street, followed by the rumbling of wheels.

Usually the company went out as it arrived, in driblets. There were some whose duties were over before the end of the opera itself and these were the soonest away. In "Lohengrin," for instance, Telramund is killed in the first scene of the last act and a

lay figure is placed on the litter, on which his supposed corpse is borne into the King's presence. Long before the final curtain, the little Italian baritone had time to cook himself a dish of macaroni, devour it, and pass out of the opera house. In "Carmen," Michaela does not come on after the third act, and she, too, usually left the house before the opera was over; but on this night, when Yudels heard the sounds which denoted the end of the performance, he suddenly realized that no one as yet had gone. He had been too busy worrying how to manage Signora's four-story ascent by way of two iron ladders, to notice anything unusual. But even now the curtain had been down long enough for the shuffling overhead and the shoving on the stage to have subsided, the iron door at the end of the passageway grimly remained closed. What had happened?

Just then the door was opened. The basso held it back. Through the doorway came the prima donna, followed by Jean, who carried a large papier-mache bowl

decorated with Egyptian hieroglyphics—a sacrificial vessel used in the temple scene in "Aida." In the space back of the doorway, Yudels could see the whole company, massed like a flood, checked by a narrow gorge. The tenor took his place by the prima donna next to the stage door and held up the bowl. "For her layette! For Signora!" said the prima donna, as she dropped a gold piece into the bowl. "Pour Signora!" exclaimed the tenor as he did likewise. "Für Signora!" reverberated through the passageway as the German mezzo advanced, dropped her contribution into the bowl, and passed out. "Per Signora!" and the Italian baritone had followed. Thus the principals first and then the chorus, the ballet, the "extra ladies," and the supers, filed past the prima donna and the tenor, each contributing his or her mite. When the last one had gone out and Jean put the bowl down on the floor, his arms were aching from the weight of the coin. The prima donna threw a beautiful Spanish lace shawl over the baby's basket as she held out

her hand to Yudels, saying, "Whenever you want anything for Signora let me know." Yudels seized her hand, as he had seen tenors do to stage queens, and pressed a kiss upon it. Also, he inwardly made up his mind that if ever again the tenor barked or meowed in the stage-door vestibule, he would gratify his whim by going out and making believe he was looking for the dog or cat.

When they had gone, Yudels took the chair and walked with it toward the iron door. He intended placing the chair against it to keep it open so that he could carry the baby in her basket through the doorway. The bowl of money would be safe in the "property" room just off the stage.

Just at this moment, as if anticipating what Yudels would be obliged to do, one of the stage hands, who apparently had some work to do before leaving, opened the door and held it back for him. Then when Yudels with Signora had passed through, he took up the bowl and carried it to the property-room. "The boss wants to see

you," he called after Yudels. The "boss" was the boss stage carpenter. The stage had been "struck" long since, but he and a couple of other stage hands, besides the one who had held the door back for Yudels, were waiting.

"How are you ever going to carry Signora up there?" asked the boss, with an upward turn of the head toward the fourth fly gallery, some one hundred and fifty feet above. "Now we fellers are going to chip into that money bowl all right enough to get her a 'lay out' or whatever you call it, but we done something better for her right here now. Come along."

All the lights on the side where Yudels' rooms were located, were burning brightly and, as the "boss" pointed upwards, Yudels saw that he and his men had rigged a pulley to one of the gridiron girders, and that a rope with four ends spliced to it was ready to be passed under a basket, so that Signora could be hoisted gently up to her new nest.

Magic charm of babyhood! Here were a group of men, rough spoken maybe, and

bearing no marks of rennement. Yet who could with more delicate intuition have perceived just what must be troubling Yudels' mind, and devised the means of relieving it? Surely, nothing brings out so fully whatever of soul there may be in human kind, as a little child. And so Signora, peacefully sleeping, made her first trip through the air, past painted turrets, tree-tops, and clouds, to her new abode.

When Yudels had safely lifted the basket with its precious burden over the rail and carried it into the apartment, he again stepped out on to the gallery. It seemed as if he must have space to think, so much had happened through that one soul coming into his life. All the lights below had been turned off. Only the one electric lamp in his own apartment sent its rays through the narrow, open doorway, until the darkness seemed to swallow them up. But gradually his eyes became used to the blackness—or was it his intense thought that enabled him to penetrate it and begin to see things assuming shape beyond. Suspended from the

gridiron, he discerned the dim outline of a rocky mountain top. It was the "drop" for one of the scenes in "Die Walküre." Arching and overhanging rocks and detached boulders, wind-twisted pines and threatening storm clouds began to loom at the end of that dark vista. The whole space below him, a plunge of nearly two hundred feet, was black.

A strange feeling crept over him. The scene became startlingly real. He seemed to be standing at night on top of a deep mountain gorge looking into the abyss. A sudden fear seized him. What if some day Signora should walk too near the edge of the gallery, slip and fall over beneath the rail? Straightway he descended the two iron ladders and the long stairs to the stage, switched on some of the lights, got some strips of wood and a hammer and nails out of the carpenter's shop, and climbing again to the gallery, high among the canvas mountains, nailed the protecting strips along the posts, which supported the rail. Dear Yudels! He had not stopped to think that it

would be months before the baby would be able to toddle, let alone walk. He had realized that at some time there might be some danger for her, and, though it was long after midnight, he had descended through the darkness and awakened the echoes of the empty, silent house, rather than have the danger remain unguarded against if only until morning. But the fund for the "lay out," the foresight of a master machinist, and Yudels' own tender apprehension were only the beginnings of what was done for Signora in the opera house.

In fact, the next morning Yudels had hardly slept himself out before he heard the pulley ropes thumping against the rail—a signal to lower the basket. When he hauled it up, it was full of packages—all kinds of artificial food for infants, cans of condensed milk and the like, while perched on top of all was a package of macaroni, addressed in the hand of the little Italian baritone, who also sent a note, giving full directions how it should be prepared. A little later there came, also via the basket,

a message from the German mezzo, saying she would give him a lesson in how to be a mother. Should she come up or would he send the little darling down in a basket?

Should she come up? Of course she did not know what she was proposing. The idea of a prima donna mounting two flights of stairs to say nothing of climbing two iron ladders! Yudels with his conventional prima donna worship would have collapsed with amazement had he not realized, through his own love for Signora, which had developed with a swiftness like magic, what people will do for a helpless child. However, the message came in very good time, for Signora was becoming restless and evidently was about to wake up. So he lifted her into the basket and sent her down, himself following.

While the baby's toilet was making and her bottle preparing, Yudels looked on in a helpless, hopeless way. For the first time he felt that he was useless—that there was nothing available for the crisis, even in the depths of his capacious coat pocket. He

might have aspired to the *rôle* of Ruiz and even to that of the Messagiero, but to dress and feed a baby—that was too evidently beyond him. The German prima donna had anticipated this. There were in the opera house about a dozen chore women, whose work was to sweep, dust and otherwise clean the vast auditorium. Through the mysterious twilight which prevailed there during the day, you could see them, some of them far up the slope of the family circle like evening figures on a hillside, slowly making their way between the rows of seats. The German mezzo had summoned several of these and had arranged, even before Yudels had received the message from her, that every morning he should send Signora down in the basket and that one and another of the women would see to the rest. The suggestion was so practicable that Yudels acquiesced, though he had a constitutional dislike to any one who did not belong strictly behind the scenes.

Certainly Signora grew up to belong there. Every day she made several trips

through the air in her basket. Sometimes it was to visit the garderobière. At others it was the property master or the women who made paper stage flowers or cut paper leaves for various species of stage trees, who wanted a visit from her. If there was a matinée the singers were sure to send for her and she would be taken to the prima donna's dressing-room where she received in state. The boss carpenter had constructed a truck on which the basket could be placed so that it was an approach to a baby carriage.

Sometimes in the evening, when Signora seemed restless and Yudels was afraid to leave her upstairs, he would place her in the wings from where she could look out upon the lighted stage and where he could keep an eye upon her. It was amusing to watch her blink at the footlights or straighten herself up when an especially loud gust of music swept up from the orchestra. Nothing frightened her, not even a hurried exit of the chorus when the singers surged by to get to their dressing-

rooms as quickly as possible. For all were careful not to bump into her, and in spite of their hurry, most of them had a quick smile for her as they scurried past. She never cried, indeed, scarcely ever made a sound while a performance was in progress. Her eyes were either on the stage or staring at a sign on the wall—"Avisso Importante" with "Silencio" in great big letters. Intuitively she seemed to know it was a warning to keep quiet.

Then there was the bewigged, bepowdered and silk-stockinged flunkey whose duty it was to raise the sliding door in the proscenium through which the singers went to acknowledge their calls before the curtain. She was not long in making a friend of him and he enjoyed taking her up in his arms and letting her look through the peephole at the audience and the orchestra. She could watch the sea of faces and next gaze in an awestruck way at the orchestra leader. Then she would regard with great intentness, a double bass player in the corner of the orchestra nearest the peephole.

She would watch him very solemnly until his fingers sprawled over the thick strings like spider's legs, when she would look up into Flunkey's face and laugh.

Yudels was obliged to answer so many questions regarding Signora that he began issuing a daily bulletin in four languages. This he tacked up in the wings every evening before the performance. At first it was just a sheet of paper. Then the boss carpenter had a board put up. On it the scenic artist painted a classical portico. The plinth bore in plain Roman lettering the inscription

—Bolettino Della Signora—

and in the space between the columns Yudels posted his bulletins. "Signora's first tooth is coming through. She is beginning to creep."

It was the only unofficial board allowed to be put up in the opera house, and it attracted as much attention as the rehearsal calls and casts tacked up at the stage door and in the dressing-rooms.

The whole company, however, knew that

Signora could walk, even before that interesting fact was chronicled on the board. She herself made it known in rather a startling way during a matinee performance of "Faust." On this occasion she had as usual been watching with wide open eyes the "property men," engaged in sticking long stemmed paper flowers into the papier-maché bed used in the garden scene. Generally there was a flower or two left over and the men gave them to Signora to play with during the scene. But this afternoon there were only just enough and Signora saw the flower bed in all its paper glory shoved on to the stage.

The stage was set, everybody was in place and the stage manager had just touched the buzzer, signalling the orchestra leader to begin, when there was a startling cry of "Signora!" from the Siebel, who was ready to make her entrance for the flower scene. They looked—and there was Signora crawling across the stage. She was nearing the flower bed! Now she was there! Now she reached out a fat little hand, closed five little

fingers around the stem of a paper rose and a moment later was waving it triumphantly in the air as much as to say, "You forgot to give it to me, did you? Well, you see, I've gone and got it myself!" Then, as if realizing that somehow the situation was perilous, she deliberately rose to her feet and toddled off into the wings, only stopping for a moment to support herself by the back of the garden bench on which Marguerite sits while singing her spinning song.

Hardly had Signora disappeared behind the scene, when the curtain went up and Siebel began the familiar "Le Parlate d'amour." She got off just in time not to make an unexpected début in opera. Yet of all those in the wings, including Siebel, who had most at stake, because the *contretemps* would have ruined the "Flower Song," not one had run out on the stage to seize and carry her off. They were so much interested in watching her go after the flower and in her rising to her feet and toddling over to the bench and from there to the wings—it was such a moment of suspense—

that they did not hear the orchestra and forgot all about the curtain. As for Signora, once back she toddled to her basket, climbed into it and, with an air of complete satisfaction, buried her little nose in the paper petals.

V

SIGNORA took special delight in those operas which ended in a display of vocal pyrotechnics for the prima donna—like "Sonnambula" or "Lucia" (when they ring down the curtain on the mad scene).

On such occasions the prima donna stood far forward, while well behind her on the stage the other principals ranged themselves in a half moon. Then, as the curtain fell, they would advance applauding and exclaiming "brava! brava!" (whether they admired her singing or were glad it was over) until the curtain was again rung up. Then they would fall back into their lunette formation.

This was repeated several times until the applause had continued long enough for the flunkey to push up the sliding door in the proscenium and the prima donna crossed and recrossed the "apron" in front of the

curtain. Signora always joined in these demonstrations, straightening herself up in her basket, clapping her little hands vigorously and piping "bravas," with her baby voice. The prima donna on her way to the front never failed to wave a hand to her smallest and most enthusiastic admirer.

Yet strangely enough the opera which most fascinated Signora, ended very differently. It was "Carmen"—the opera that was "on" the night she was left at the stage door—which she had a perfect passion for watching. From the opening chorus to the fall of the curtain upon the murdered cigarette girl, her eyes were fairly glued to what was proceeding on the stage. It was useless to attempt to remove her from behind the wings during a performance of this opera; and the prima donna's dressing-room had no charm for her then, unless Carmen herself was in there. Even the "Avisso Importante" lost its terrors, for the only occasion on which she had disregarded its warning was the first time she watched a rehearsal of "Carmen."

It was not even a dress rehearsal. Carmen herself wore a cardigan over a street costume; Michaela was in a shirt waist and bicycle skirt with a round felt hat; Escamillo, the gay Toreador, had on a cutaway coat and grey trousers; Don Jose, a light tan top coat over a sack suit with highly polished tan shoes;—yet Signora watched and listened as she never had watched and listened before. It was a night rehearsal and the hour grew so late that Yudels thought it time for her to be hoisted up to bed. But the moment he approached her to fasten the rope around the basket, she set up a series of shrieks that stopped the rehearsal and brought every one on the stage around her.

Nothing any one could say or do—no persuasion, no soothing, no, not even the bonbon which Carmen held up so temptingly near her little mouth—was of avail. She continued shrieking and fighting with arms and legs until Yudels gave up. Then she subsided. The rehearsal went on; and after a few fitful sobs she thrust a thumb in her mouth, and again was all attention.

"What do you say to that? Can you explain it?" asked Yudels, who was much disturbed by the incident, of some of the artists who stood in a group on the stage waiting for the conductor to finish some excited extemporaneous remarks addressed to the orchestra.

"It is the food you give her," angrily exclaimed the little Italian baritone. "Why don't you bring her up on macaroni?"

"Bah!" commented the Carmen, who was a Frenchwoman and the greatest Carmen that ever lived, looking contemptuously down at the little baritone. "You should know better. Who is she? Who was her mother? What do we know about Signora or where she came from? But I can tell you one thing, from what happened to-night. Somewhere back of her—no matter how many generations—is a Carmen. Look at her eyes. How dark, how deep they are. Did you see the fire leap from them when she was angry? That is Spain or Southern France, which is the same thing. And then how easily she is picking up French and

Italian—the Latin tongues—and how she stumbles over that nasty German. All this evening when I have been on the stage, her eyes have followed me. Don't you suppose I have felt them? There is a Carmen back of it all, I tell you. Some woman of her race has been killed for love. She has the strain in her blood. Watch her well, Yudels; watch Signora. It is the bad in us that always crops out. The good in us? Bah! It cannot stand up against the bad that is back of it! No matter how we may shrink from it and, God knows, some of us struggle hard enough against it—a hand seems to reach out from that mysterious past and thrust us on!"

"Madame, your cue! The stage is waiting!"

A moment later Carmen, with the fatal grace of a serpent in every motion of her swaying body, was singing *Près le bastion de Seville;* while Signora, sitting bolt upright in her basket, was staring at her.

After this episode the costumer made a little Carmen costume for Signora, copied,

crimson skirt and all, after that worn by the prima donna who was so famous in the character; and, whenever the opera was given Signora was attired in the costume of the *rôle*. There were two Carmens—the vivid, impassioned artist on the stage, and the child who sat in the wings without removing her eyes from her. Indeed, Signora became so familiar with the opera that often she could be seen following with the movement of her lips what the real Carmen was singing, and swaying her little body in unison. Nothing could be more intense than the look she fastened on Carmen in the death scene. From the moment Carmen staggered and fell under the thrust of Don Jose's dagger, till she sprang to her feet with the fall of the curtain, Signora watched as if she feared a real blow had been struck, and the prima donna really had been killed. The relief in the child's tension when the singer, who had been quick to note the impression made by the scene on the little one's mind, was on her feet again and threw Signora a kiss, was plainly visible on her features.

Naturally the prima donna who had made Carmen famous, and whom in turn "Carmen" may be said to have made famous, felt herself drawn strongly toward the child. In fact, she was fascinated with her, and Yudels had orders, whenever Bizet's opera was given, to bring her into the dressing-room as soon as Carmen arrived. Probably no child was ever talked to, or rather talked at, in such an amazing way as was Signora in this dressing-room of "Carmen" nights. The prima donna had the mercurial temperament of Southern France. She was one of the greatest of artists, yet in many ways still a child. Because she was still a child she thought the other child, who sat up in the basket watching her every motion, could understand everything she said.

This is what usually occurred. About seven o'clock in swept the prima donna, followed by two maids. A quick embrace and a rapid fire discharge of kisses for Signora.

"Air! air! I stifle!"

Unlike most other prima donnas, this Carmen delighted in fresh air, and in a moment one

of the maids had raised the window. Yudels, who knew Carmen's hobby, always had Signora well bundled up before taking her into the dressing-room.

"Now read something lively! Quick!"

The maids had put on their wraps to protect themselves against the cold. One of them was preparing to dress the prima donna and make her up for her *rôle*. The other opened the latest French novel, received that day by post direct from Calman Levy, and began reading, alternately holding the book in one hand while she warmed the other over the gas jet. Every now and then the maid looked up and watched the prima donna, for she had learned from experience her mistress's whims.

Suddenly the singer, who had been pacing the room humming to herself as she tossed her everyday clothes hither and thither, or stopped a moment to get into part of her costume, halted right in front of Signora and drew a long breath. The maid ceased reading. Signora stared. She knew what was coming, and in a moment

from between Carmen's rounded lips issued a vibrant trill that made the child draw herself up and listen as hard as she stared. The trill ended, the diva, with a toss of the head, dropped into a chair at the make-up table, and held out her cheek to be rouged. Up she jumped again before the maid had half finished. Swaying her body to the rhythm of the "Habanera," or "Seguidilla," and gracefully swinging her arms as if she were striking the tambourine or playing the castanets, she sang softly, but with all the arch coquetry she knew so well how to put into the *rôle*. Then back again to the dressing-table, and more reading aloud.

"My jupon!"

She snatched the crimson satin petticoat with cerise ruffles—the most striking part of her Carmen costume—from the maid, and holding it to her waist addressed Signora, just as if she thought the child understood every word.

"Perhaps you think, Signora, that this satin petticoat and the cerise ruffles are too rich for a Spanish cigarette girl. Oh, I

know I've been criticised for wearing it. But, do you know, Signora, it is actually the most real thing in my costume. I went to Spain to get up my Carmen costume, and it is just right; I went to Seville, the very city in which the scene of 'Carmen' is laid. I watched many a cigarette girl at the very doors of the factories.

"There are second-hand costumers in Spain, just as there are in Paris and London and here. I tracked many of my models to these second-hand shops. I saw one of them buy just such a skirt as this at the very same shop. I saw her flirting with her dress to show her brilliant petticoat. It proved that she was not used to such finery and wanted people to notice her. I make precisely the same point. Carmen, you know, isn't very nice. In fact she's very naughty.—Now don't you grow up to be like her!

"Then the crimson roses which I wear in my hair—give them to me, Suzette."

The maid would hand them to the prima donna, who would thrust the long stems into her thick black hair.

"Here again I follow the custom of the Spanish cigarette girls. In spring and summer these roses form their only head covering."

Then she would slip on the satin petticoat, take the handglass from the table, and look at herself coquettishly. "Am I pretty, Signora? 'Yes?'—'Beautiful?' Well! there are five girls in our family—and I am the ugliest."

As likely as not she let the mirror fall. When that occurred she covered her face with her hands and shuddered (for she was filled with superstition) till Suzette had picked it up with a reassuring, "It is not broken, madame."

"Ah! then the performance will go all right. But if it had broken, who knows what would happen! Now for a roulade!" and her beautiful voice ran up and down the scale, richly and smoothly, till the whole room seemed filled with luscious sound. Strange mixture of music, coquetry, and superstition! Is it a wonder that no other singer could approach her as Carmen? She was Carmen.

"Now let me tell you something else, Signora. It may help you if ever you become an opera singer, which you mustn't think of doing—always living for your voice —you can't do this, you can't do that —always wondering one year if you have grown any older since the last, or if the public will think you have! But never mind about that now. They don't know that I have—the poor fools. A few years longer, a few extra touches of rouge each year—ha, ha, what will they know? But the time will come when poor Carmen's voice will be cracked and gone, when Don Jose might as well run his dagger through her worthless heart; for, to the footlights, she will be dead. And then?—but no matter, Signora. Let me tell you something very funny. When I rehearsed Carmen for the first time, the stage manager wanted me to do it one way and I wanted to do it the other. So I did mine. He called in the director to give me a talking to.

"'Leave her alone,' said the director—'She has no idea of "Carmen," and she will

find it out at the first performance. It will be a good punishment for her.'

"You should have seen them open their eyes at the première when the audience simply went wild over me. Oh! it was grand; and next morning 'Figaro' and the other papers said I was *the* Carmen. Yes, Signora, it is *the* Carmen in whose dressing-room you are and whom you are going to watch to-night. It will be a great thing for you to remember when I have been laid away in my tomb.

"My tomb? Why, signora, haven't I told you all about it? No? I have had a beautiful tomb designed and it is all for myself too. Why? Partly to save my mother the trouble of buying a headstone after I die, partly to be sure that I shall lie amid artistic surroundings. I am an artist and,"—with a shudder—"I should hate to run any risk of being buried under anything ugly. It will be something worth looking at. There will be two statues of myself—as Ophelia and as Carmen. You know they both die. They are tragic *rôles*. That's

"My tomb? Haven't I told you about it?"

the reason I have these statues on my tomb. Death is not very amusing, except possibly to those who are going to inherit your money.

"Where will I have my tomb erected? Either in Père la Chaise, the big cemetery in Paris, or on my little farm in Southern France. I suppose either place is peaceful enough, though I take it for granted I won't hear any noise once I am inside—not even if a whole orchestra played Wagner right by the door, though if they were to strike up the '*Seguidilla*,' I might come out and dance it for them."

"Curtain's up, Madame!"

"Come, Signora!"

VI

THE "Carmen" prima donna was not the only one who spoiled Signora. The child was the pet of the whole opera house. The German mezzo would pack her under her capacious arm as if she were a bundle and carry her to where the miniature hobby horses used in "Die Walküre" were stalled between performances. These wooden horses were introduced in the "Ride of the Valkyrs" with boys dressed up as Valkyrs,—flowing garments, breastplates, shields, helmets, and spears. They were slid over a narrow bridge at the rear of the stage and in front of a gauze drop amid flashes of lightning and reverberations of thunder. This was the distant approach of the wild sisters of the

air depicted to the eye and heralded to the ear.

Signora enjoyed watching the scene, which was a source of secret grief to Yudels, who could not understand why it was that any one in any way connected with him should want to remain anywhere except as far away as possible from a Wagner performance. When the German mezzo lifted her on one of the hobby horses, Signora would point to the "thunder-box," a great square frame covered with rawhide, and nod with her little head persistently in its direction; and nothing would do but for the mezzo to go over to the thunder-box and thump it with all her might. Then Signora, when the thunder reverberated just as it did at the real performance, would draw herself up and proudly sit astride her wooden steed as she had seen the boy Valkyrs do. Just what were the first words Signora ever uttered is not of record, but they are as likely to have been "ho-jo-to-ho" as anything else. It was a great scene. Signora urging on the hobby horse as if the fate of a

performance hung in the balance and she were riding to save the day; the large German mezzo thumping at the thunder-box and so carried away by the excitement of the moment that she allowed the huge volume of her voice to roll out weird Valkyr shouts above the storm she herself was creating.

The first time this occurred there chanced to be a rehearsal on the stage. When those engaged in it heard the strange din, the conductor rapped on his desk and the rehearsal came to an abrupt stop. Flushed with anger he went down into the cellar whence the sounds came. In a few moments he reappeared and beckoning all to follow, led the way down the cellar steps, which were soon crowded with principals, chorus singers, and orchestra players. There was a few seconds silence of amazement, then a suppressed titter, and then such a burst of laughter that it drowned the thunder of the tempest and caused the German mezzo, who had her back turned to the stairs, to look around. As the full significance

" The first time this occurred there chanced to be a rehearsal on the stage "

of the scene gradually dawned upon her, her strokes with the drum sticks became limper and limper until the thunder died away in a long descrescendo and she herself collapsed and fairly writhed on the cellar floor with merriment, while Signora angrily waved her spear at the crowd on the stairs who had spoiled her fun.

Signora was a polyglot little thing, for she heard no less than four languages spoken around her most of the time and probably had been told she was a darling in six or seven. No wonder that when she began to speak it usually was half English, half in the language of the person to whom she was speaking. Most of the great artists were foreigners and spoke German, French, and Italian, but the stage hands and the other employees spoke English. And then there was the American prima donna, one of the loveliest women on the stage—an exquisite Marguerite, Juliet, and Elsa; the most charming Michaela in "Carmen" (so pure and sweet looking), and so ravishingly beautiful as Aida that no one wondered

Rhadames should have preferred the slave to the princess. Signora's feelings toward her were quite different from those she had toward the great French Carmen. The latter completely fascinated her with her almost unceasing movement and chatter. There was something mysterious, almost hypnotic, in the charm she exercised over the child, and yet not so mysterious either, for did she not exert it over her audiences, over everybody who saw and heard her, in fact? But when Signora went into the American prima donna's dressing-room and climbed up into her lap and saw the beautiful Madonna-like face bending over, she would reach out her arms and place them confidingly around the lovely singer's neck.

There was in the company a large French basso cantando, the famous Planky, a superb artist, and a very handsome man. He was a great favorite at the Sunday night concerts at the opera house, from which he was never allowed to escape without singing Faure's "Les Rameux" and Schumann's "Two Grenadiers" as encores to his regular

"And so ravishingly beautiful as Aida"

numbers on the programme. The last note of the "Marseillaise," with which the "Two Grenadiers" ends, he invariably emphasized with a characteristic martial gesture—an imaginary sword thrust—which completely carried the audience off its feet and made them re-demand even the encore. He had the artist's soul, and was so frankly and disingenuously vain about his voice and looks—priding himself especially on his finely shaped nose—that no one could possibly find fault with him for being so. Sometimes the American prima donna appeared at these concerts, and then they sang together, in most exquisite style, Faure's duet, "La Crucifix," their singing of it being the finest example of bel canto heard on the concert or operatic stage since the days when Patti and Scalchi appeared together in "Semiramide."

Just before it was time for them to go on, Planky would call for the prima donna at her dressing-room door. One might suppose that a singer, a few moments before going on the stage, would feel a trifle nervous

regarding his voice, or his success with the audience, and, that, if at such a critical moment he said anything at all to the other artist, with whom he was going to sing, it would concern the piece or some little nuance in expression which had suggested itself to him. But not so with our friend, the French basso cantando. For as the prima donna joined him, and they stood in the wings ready to go on, he would bow, and, with a sweeping gesture, say: "Ah, Madame, now they are going to see the two most beautiful noses in the company!" Possibly he would have liked to have said "*the* most beautiful nose in the company," but he was too gallant to disparage the prima donna's by referring only to his own. Besides hers really was quite as beautiful.

Signora and he were great friends. He used to take her high on his shoulder and hold her up so she could reach out and pick paper leaves off some of the "practical" trees behind the scenes; or he would carry her around to make calls at the different dressing-rooms.

His voice was so sonorous and he was so large and dignified in his bearing (when he had to be) that they cast him for the full line of high priests in the company's repertoire. At the same time he was so versatile that he was the greatest Mephistopheles ever seen on the opera stage. Signora seemed to appreciate the contrast between the *rôles* in which he appeared. For, when he was carrying her about, she would grab one of his moustachios as if she were pulling a bell rope and when, in obedience to the signal, he would stop to find out what she wanted, she would say with a roguish glance "Vous etes le boss high priest et le boss devil of the company." She was a knowing little thing. For sometimes, when he was carrying her about, she would raise a finger to him to stop and, when he halted, point to her nose and say, as seriously as she could, "Now zey will see ze two most beautiful noses in ze company." Whenever she did this, he was so amused that he nearly dropped her.

In fact she grew up to be as intimate

with the great singers of the company—the divinities of the operatic stage—as if they were her brothers and sisters. To her, the great Polish tenor simply was "Jean" and his brother, the basso, who looked big enough to swallow her, merely "Edouard." Nothing amused her more than the tenor's fad of imitating animals. Often when he was standing behind the scenes, ready to go on as Siegfried, or Lohengrin, or Faust, she would say, "Now Jean, monkey!" Then whether Jean was clad in the skins of wild beasts or in the silver armor of Lohengrin or wore the garb of the ill-fated Marguerite's lover, down he would crouch on his haunches and go through his monkey tricks in a manner that would have set her off in a loud cackle had it not been for that awful "Avisso Importante," with its portentous "Silencio" above her head. A moment later "Jean" would get his cue, pull himself together, stride out on the stage and, as Siegfried, Lohengrin, or Faust, sway the great audience at will.

Everybody behind the scenes knew Signora

and it seemed as if none of them could do enough for her. To begin with, there was the wardrobe woman, who had had the miniature Carmen costume made for Signora. Not a stitch of clothing for the child did she allow to be made outside the opera house. Then in addition to the "Carmen" dress she prepared a whole line of operatic costumes for her; and, because she had a pretty figure and Lohengrin's suit of silver armor was so handsome, the wardrobe woman made a small set of armor for the girl, who strutted around in it on "Lohengrin" nights as proudly as if she were Jean himself. The *gardrobiere* liked to carry Signora about the wardrobe rooms, for the child, being feminine, manifested the liveliest interest in the costumes and in the many women at work in the department. As the dressing of an opera sometimes involves the making of costumes for some two or three hundred people, there often was great activity in the wardrobe-room, bolts of silk and satin, and spools of heavy braid being unwound; and many fingers busily plying needles or deftly

guiding stuffs over sewing machines, whose whirr made the rooms hum like a factory. And such an array of costumes already in stock! If men and women of all historic generations—Egyptian, Assyrian, classic, mediæval; knights and ladies, burghers, soldiers, peasants—suddenly had come to life again and made their appearance in the wardrobe-rooms, they could have been clothed according to the fashion of their day. A large hanging closet and a drawer were assigned to each opera in the repertoire, the closet for the chorus, the drawer for the principals, except that all the devils, Mephistopheles and the others, were kept in a drawer by themselves, presumably in order that they might not lead the other characters astray. Signora, who was not long in taking in the arrangements, would point to the devil drawer and chuckle, "Me see big Planky with ze two most beautiful noses in ze company." She liked to be in the room about four o'clock in the afternoon, when the costumes for the night's opera were taken out and sent downstairs to be hung

on long lines of hooks in the chorus and ballet rooms, or placed in the principal's dressing-rooms. Signora soon was able to distinguish the costumes of the different principals and, as they were taken out, would exclaim "Jean!" "Edouard!" "Big German!" Next morning she would be up there again watching the inspection of the costumes—each loosened stitch taken in, every tear mended, every missing button replaced, before they were put away.

Besides the amusement which Signora derived from observing the proceedings in the costumer's department, there was another reason why she liked the woman at the head of it. It was to her suggestion she owed her first doll—and several others which followed in its wake—the most remarkable set of dolls any child ever had possessed. When the wardrobe woman had finished making the Carmen costume for Signora, and everybody behind the scenes was talking about it and saying how handsome the child looked in it, the wardrobe woman turned to the property master, and

said: "You make her a doll, and I'll dress it up in a Carmen costume for her." The property master was delighted with the suggestion. He had just finished a new serpent for "Rheingold," a reptile that could indulge in the most realistic convolutions, and some monkeys with movable joints, which could be worked by boys inside, for the "Magic Flute." To make a doll for a baby whom the whole opera house adored would be a pleasant change. He set about it at once.

The property master's workshop was upstairs, off the fly gallery. In it he had a large alcohol oven and all the necessary materials for modelling and casting, or otherwise manufacturing, the needed properties. When you entered you saw a leg lying on the table, a head deposited in the corner, part of a dragon undergoing repairs on the floor, an Egyptian standard placed against the wall, with a few monkeys and snakes and a bear's head variously disposed about the place. Men were busy making moulds of clay, or pressing layers of wet paper into

moulds already finished. The property master usually drew out the designs, and had his assistants carry out the actual work under his supervision. But the doll for Signora he was unwilling to entrust to hands less skillful than his own. It was to be made with even more care than the "props" used in the most expensive productions.

Tacked about the walls were a lot of photographs of celebrities. Chancing to look up while he was modelling the doll's head, his eyes rested on a photograph of the famous Carmen prima donna. An idea! Deftly running his fingers over the clay—a few glances at the prima donna's face—and the doll's head began to take on an unmistakable resemblance to her. When a mould had been made from the clay and the head had been cast in papier maché and hardened in the alcohol furnace, the body, arms and legs put on, and the creation dressed up in a Carmen costume—there was a miniature reproduction of the great prima donna in her greatest *rôle*.

This Carmen doll, of which the property

master and the costumer were immensely proud, was admired very much behind the scenes by everybody, even by the prima donna herself. "Ah, Signora," she exclaimed, "no wonder I draw big houses, if I am as pretty as that. Be sure you grow up pretty, Signora. But no—haven't I warned you against being an opera singer? Yet why not? Perhaps you will grow up to have a voice, and I will teach you to sing Carmen. Then when I grow old and begin to lose my voice and the public that now pelts me with roses won't think even the thorns good enough for me, or when I am lying voiceless and motionless with Carmen and Ophelia watching silently beside me, you may keep up the traditions. You shall sing and act it just as finely as I do. You shall be just as fine a Carmen. Of course, the old men in the audience will shake their heads and say: 'I heard the great Carmen, Caravé, in her prime, and this one is a novice compared with her,' but you will be just as fine as I am now, and they will come to see whatever they may say." Then she

"Producing thunder by dropping cannon balls into a trough"

would murmur to herself, "If she grows up to have a voice, what a Carmen she will make!"

The Carmen doll was just the beginning of such a set of dolls as no child ever had. It occurred to the costumer that the prima donna doll might just as well have a full set of costumes for the Caravé repertoire. So she and her assistants went to work forthwith and produced costumes which enabled Signora to dress up her miniature counterfeit presentment of Mme. Caravé as Santuzza in "Cavalleria," Marguerite in "Faust," and other *rôles* in which she had appeared. Nor did the matter stop there. The property master and the costumer reproduced all the famous principals in the company with a full line of costumes and with evening dress for those who were popular at the Sunday night concerts. Most of all, however, the Carmen doll was in evidence, though, when Signora knew that the big French basso cantando was going to sing, she would have Yudels get "Planky" and the lovely American prima donna down

from the shelf in the wardrobe room where the dolls were kept. Then she would dress them in evening costume and lie in wait for the big Frenchman. When he appeared ready to go on, she would point to the dolls, which she had ranged up against one of the wings, and exclaim triumphantly, "See, Planky! Ze two most beautiful noses in ze company!" For this little performance she always had an audience composed of the stage manager, the other singers of the evening and the employees of the house who came to look forward to it as a regular feature of a Sunday evening concert. No one was more amused than big "Planky" himself, who usually caught up Signora in his arms as if to carry her out on the stage with him. How little the expectant "front of the house" realized what was going on behind the scenes!

But the boss carpenter was not to be outdone by the wardrobe and "props." He went to work and made a highly finished set of miniature closets and drawers, so that Signora could hang up or stow away the

costumes, just as she had seen it done by the wardrobe women.

When the "Boss" called her into his shop to inspect them, she went into ecstasies over them. Then she stood back and after examining them critically, walked up to one of the drawers, tapped it with her foot, and with a knowing nod said, "This will be the drawer for 'Planky' and the other devils!"

VII

AS soon as the scenic artist heard what the costume and property departments had done for Signora, he straightway must needs be doing something. What! Stand idly by and let others contribute to the amusement of the little pet of the opera house? Not he.

Signora was on good terms with the scenic artist and the scene painters as with every one else behind the scenes. She was the first, after the heads of the various departments to know that a new opera was going to be put on; for hardly a day passed that she did not flit in and out of their rooms, where she had *carte blanche*, and watch them at work. The progress of the big painted scenes for the opera house always interested her. The scenic artist's studio was one of her favorite haunts. Perched on a high stool, her feet

drawn up on one of the top rungs, her elbows on her knees, her arms and hands supporting her face, she kept her eyes fastened on his work. Often he did not know she was there until he happened to turn as he was taking up some fresh paint on his brush, for she flitted in and out so lightly, and ascended her perch so noiselessly, that her entrances and exits were rarely noticed and, when the scenic artist did turn, he found her eyes not on him, but on his work, looking at the paints, if he happened to be making his colors on the palette, or following his brush if he were actually engaged in painting.

This was characteristic of Signora. There was a curious difference in her attitude towards the singers and towards those who contributed to the material outfit of an operatic production. With the singers she speedily made herself personally intimate. When they sang she watched them. She often clambered up into their laps or into their arms; made Jean and Edouard do their tricks for her; pulled Planky's

moustachios; kissed the prima donnas, and went scampering through their dressing-rooms in her various, picturesque costumes. In fact, with the artists she was one of them. Their personalities attracted her as if she had something in common with them and felt as if she were going to grow up to be like them—as if she, herself, were a little artist.

But with the other people about the opera house, it was what they did that attracted her. They did things with their hands, and that seemed intuitively to put them on a lower plane with her. The queens and princes of the opera, to whom they all looked up and whose whims were law—she was their equal. Others knocked at the dressing-room doors and bowed and scraped—she passed in and out without so much as "by your leave." A mere child—the sprite of the opera house—she was an artist by instinct. The singers were the artists of the organization—they were the decisive things in opera. The others? There was something mechanical and something material

about what they did, and she, unconsciously to herself (and to them also), kept them at a distance, as a princess of the royal blood would keep her attendants at a certain distance. Yet Signora was adored just the same by the artisans of the opera house. They grew to have a certain feeling, almost a superstition, about her visits. If she stayed and watched their work, they were sure it was going on well. If she did not pay much attention to it, as if it did not interest her, they knew it was not up to the standard.

There was much to make the scenic department attractive to her. To watch something develop from a little sketch on paper to a scene that filled the big stage of the opera house, was almost like being a spectator at the creation of a new world. Before the work of putting on a new opera began, there was a vast amount of consulting between the heads of departments, regarding the color scheme of costumes, scenery, and the various properties to be used, and regarding the light effects. Then they all

set to figuring and casting up the cost of what they proposed doing. Generally it was much too high, and they had to consult all over again. Then when the scenic artist had sacrificed his pet idea of having a broad circular stairway in his new palace (without which he had said that the old palace might as well be "faked" up for the production) and the other departments had made similar sacrifices, until it had been demonstrated satisfactorily that the expenses would not eat up possible profits for three seasons to come, work was begun.

A few rough sketches in black and white, and the scenic artist began his first scene in water-color on an ordinary-sized sketch block. Signora enjoyed watching him put on the colors, and seeing how one over the other made certain combinations of tints, and brought out certain effects. But this was only a flat aquarelle. How could the artist tell what it was going to be like when it had been spread over a drop, wings, properties and set pieces? And now came the very thing that most fascinated Signora

" A perfect miniature scene in his little theatre "

with the scenic artist's department. For, on the table in his studio, he had a little theatre, possibly three feet high and correspondingly deep, with proscenium arches and "tormentors" (stationary wings representing drawn curtains just back of the proscenium) and arrangements for the drop wings, borders, and other scenic accessories. From his water-color sketch, he proceeded to make a perfect miniature scene. So much of it as was to be represented on the large drop of the opera-house stage was painted upon the little three-foot high drop of the miniature theatre, and, in the same manner, wings, borders and set pieces were prepared for the little stage. According as it was an exterior or an interior, it had the same stony paths, arched bridges, cliffs, lawn, trees and "run-ways"; or the same columns, bay windows, stairways, niches and galleries, painted on flat, or "practical," as they would have to be on the big stage. In this manner the scene was shown in the miniature theatre just as it would be on the real stage of the opera house.

When the scene had been set on the little stage, came the part which Signora liked perhaps better than any other part of the work. The scenic artist had, connected with his miniature stage, a perfect system of electric lights, corresponding in scale with that of the opera-house stage. He had a row of the tiniest and cutest electrical footlights of white, blue, red, and amber, each lamp hardly larger than a finger nail. He had the same scheme of lighting in the borders and back of the proscenium, so that he could try the effects on his scene model of the very combinations of colored lights that would be used in the performance, and could make any changes in the color scheme which he thought necessary before the model was handed over to the painters to be enlarged on the enormous canvasses.

As soon as he began to darken the room, Signora knew what was coming. She liked to watch him turn on the various little cranks of the miniature electric switchboard, and throw the different combinations of light on the scene. When she liked the combination,

she applauded, and then the scenic artist was much pleased, and called in the electrician, who agreed that the effect was very fine and said that the artist knew more about lighting up a scene than any one else he had ever known—and all the time it was Signora.

For whether it was music, or painting, or lighting, or costuming, the child was artistic to her finger tips.

Afterwards the costumer, property master, and stage carpenter were called in, the scenic artist standing off and looking at his creation as if he were quite willing to leave it all to their judgment, though in reality he was enraptured at what he had done and considered it his masterpiece, as he did every other scene he had painted. The stage manager thought it very beautiful and it was really too bad, but he had to bring on a hundred people in the finale and the stairs (on the broad sweep of which the scenic artist had relied for one of his great effects) would have to be moved back. The costumer also admired the scene, but she had just been offered some beautiful purple

satins at a bargain and she wanted to use them in the costumes for this act, and could he not deepen the color tones a little so as to make them in harmony with the fabrics? And so, each one praised—yet suggested changes; always going to the extremes in expatiating upon the necessity of harmonizing all the effects, knowing that the scenic artist would fight for his own; and so it was that, somehow or other, each got pretty much what each wanted in the compromise that was always reached.

Then came the transfer of the scene, from the model to the high canvas drop and wings.

This was done on a "paint bridge"—another spot that Signora haunted. In most theatres this is usually a platform, which is raised and lowered by ropes like the platform used by house painters. But at the opera-house it was really a narrow bridge spanning the space between the first fly galleries and forming the only upstairs connection between the two sides of the house, behind the scenes. Otherwise, every time a person wanted to reach one side of

the house, from the other, he would have been obliged to go downstairs and cross the stage. The paint bridge enabled him to save at least several of the long stairways.

On the fly galleries near the paint bridge and on the bridge itself, were tables with earthenware jars and cans, full of paint, with brushes as large as those used by house painters—a fantasy in brilliant disorder. Sometimes the choicest color to be used on a scene, was mixed in an old tomato can or pail, or anything else that happened to be handy. The great canvases were raised or lowered into position back of the paint bridge, according to the portion of the scene or model which the painters wanted to enlarge on canvas. For the scenic artist had prepared his scene model to a "scale," so that each one-half inch on the model, was enlarged to a foot on the painted scene. The paint bridge was about fifty feet above the stage and there was nothing but the loose hanging canvas to prevent anyone who took a misstep from being precipitated to

the stage below, but Signora was thoroughly at home there, and never thought of danger. Sometimes she would clamber up on one of the tables and stir the thick, scummy paint in the earthenware jars or cans, or thin it out with turpentine; or she would grab the brushes out of the painters' hands and herself put a stroke or two on the canvas, where the scene painters always allowed them to remain—just for good luck.

One reason why Signora liked the paint-bridge was that from there she could see what was going on on the stage below, besides watching the painting of the scenery. Occasionally, she would leave the bridge for one of the fly galleries and peer down on the diminutive-looking figures singing and gesticulating far beneath her. It was like looking down upon a world from the clouds, for up there in the flies she was on a line with the sky borders. Then, too, she enjoyed poking the Siegfried dragon, that was hoisted up there after performances, so as to be out of the way, and hung by a pulley, but not too high for her to reach if there

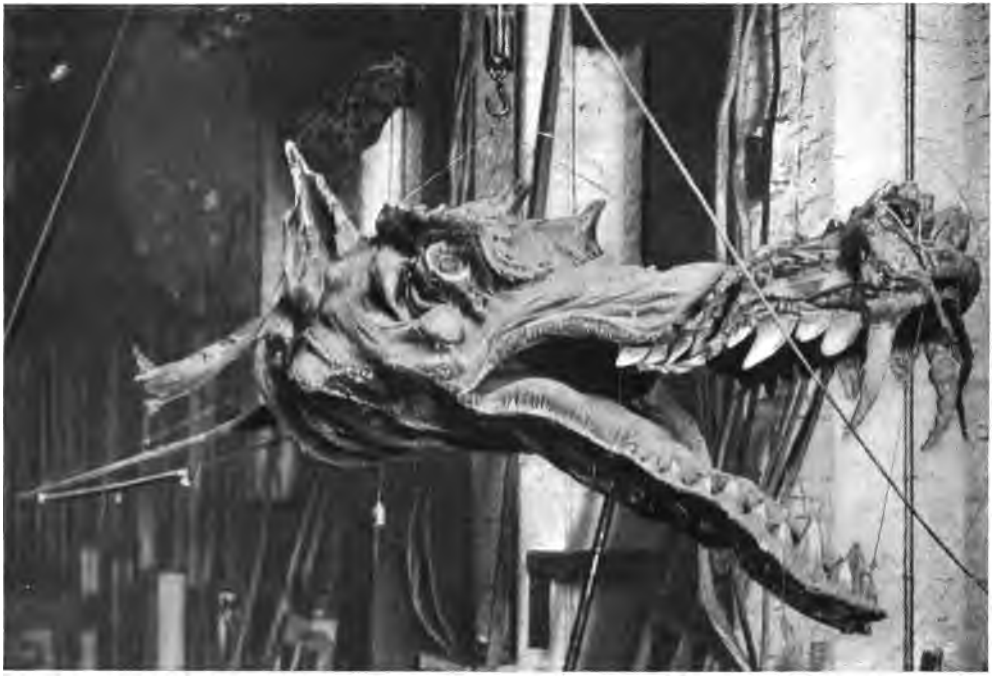
chanced to be one of the light "property" halberds or some ancient or mediæval weapon handy, as there generally was. She liked to jab at the monster, that looked so fierce, and yet was little more than green scaly cloth mounted on a wire frame and had a huge papier-maché head, with moving jaws and eyelids—electric lamps in its eyes and, in its fangs, a gas pipe, through which at performances it emitted steam, supposed to be the dragon's poisonous and deadly breath, when the gas pipe was properly connected by a hose with a steam cock in a "pocket" on the stage. Every time she jabbed the dragon, it swayed slowly to and fro, rustling with its tail and shaking its head in a regretful sort of way, as if it realized that in prehistoric times it would not have been the sport of a little waif behind the scenes of the opera house.

As the drops and borders were worked from the fly galleries, there were pulleys and cleats and ropes enough there for a full-rigged ship, and if, sometimes, Signora was drowsy from long watching of the painters or baiting

the dragon, she would curl herself up in a hollow of one of these big coils and go to sleep.

As Signora grew older she became more independent. One day when Yudels was hoisting her up, some one called him and, as usual, he made fast the rope, so that the basket hung about half way between the first and second galleries and near the paint bridge. Not long afterwards the scene painters were startled by sounds like sharp blows from a wooden hammer. On looking around, they discovered that the "Siegfried" dragon was blinking at them, its heavy wooden eyelids, every time they closed, coming down with a smart whack. Some one was "working" them, but who?

A few minutes later the men knew, for Signora crept out of the head and into her basket, and Yudels at that moment resuming operations, was hoisted up to her eyrie, the amused and astonished men following her with their eyes until she had safely landed. Of course, Yudels heard of it (for that matter, everybody behind the scenes



" The ' Siegfried' dragon was blinking at them"

knew of it within the next half hour) and he was very proud of the instinct that had enabled her to "work" the dragon's eyes without ever having been shown how. Her little fingers had avoided the stop cock, which during the performances was connected with the steam hose, and made the monster breathe steam from its huge fangs, and the electric button which caused its eyes to shine like fire, and had sought out the wires which drew up its eyelids, the only things which could be "worked" while the dragon was hanging up, and disconnected from the steam and electric apparatus.

One of the properties Signora always enjoyed was the big serpent used in "Rheingold." This was a monster about fifteen feet long, made with moveable joints and ingeniously constructed so that it would crawl across the stage, wriggling its body, switching its tail and rearing its head.

There was a door in its back just behind its eyes, and when the time came for the monster to go on the stage, this door was opened and a boy got inside the snake and

lay flat on his stomach; then the door was closed. The snake was mounted on small casters and there were two small holes in its belly. Through these the boy thrust a couple of small pegs and by jabbing them into the floor of the stage, made the reptile crawl in the most natural manner. His feet rested in stirrups connected with two wires that ran through the joints back to the tail; and, as he jabbed the pegs into the stage, he would go through the motions of swimming, drawing the wires towards him and letting them slack again. In this way he made the reptile go through a series of convolutions, and by raising his body at the same time caused it to rear its head. Thus the serpent appeared to crawl and wriggle in the most natural manner and was one of the star performers of "Rheingold."

Signora had often watched the proceedings. She had seen the whole method of working it explained to a new boy. That was quite enough for her. When he had done the trick and was out, she insisted on getting in; and when Signora insisted no

one resisted. So in she got and closed the door upon herself, and a moment later was propelling the reptile across the stage in the most approved fashion. When she emerged from the monster she received a round of applause and, at the suggestion of the German mezzo, who was one of the Rhine-daughters, she was appointed understudy to the Rheingold serpent. During the rest of the season she hoped every time the work was announced for a performance, that the boy would fail to appear. But, alas, he was as punctual as clock work.

However, Signora was destined to make her début sooner and in a better way than she expected, and in full view of an audience. Among Signora's special pets were the Lohengrin swans—for there were two of them. Yes, it required two in order to have one arrive properly with the Knight of the Holy Grail in time to save Elsa. There were a big and a little swan, both of them made of cloth stretched on wire framing and covered with cotton for feathers. They and the silver shell boats were mounted on

trucks which were hidden from the audience's view by blue painted strips of canvas—"set water"—representing the river Scheldt, and another strip which formed its grassy bank. Under each truck were seats for two men, who shoved the apparatus along with their feet, the man on the front seat steering the swan and the boat by an iron rod attached to one of the wheels.

The smaller of the two swans, with a lay figure dressed up in a Lohengrin costume, was propelled across the stage, far back near the drop, so that Lohengrin was first seen as if approaching from far up the river, and then disappearing around a bend. A few minutes later, the big swan and boat, with the Knight of the Holy Grail, issued forth from the wings and drew proudly up at the river bank. Then Lohengrin sang "Leb Wohl Mein Schwan, Mein Lieber Schwan"; one of the men on the truck pulled a wire attached to the swan's beak, which made the bird gracefully incline its head as if in answer to its master's words; the knight in his silver armor stepped ashore; the swan and

the boat were shoved off behind the scenes; and Elsa's champion had arrived. What would the nobles and burghers of Brabant, to say nothing of King Henry and Elsa herself, have thought of him had they known how he managed it?

One night, when the small truck was being tried to see if it worked all right, before being shoved on the stage, it was discovered that the rod supporting the lay figure had become loosened so that the miniature Lohengrin wobbled most outrageously. This was hardly consistent with the dignity of an emissary from the Holy Grail. What was to be done at this critical moment? The audience would be sure to laugh at this wobbling Lohengrin. The stage manager was in despair when his eyes suddenly lighted upon Signora, who was strutting about in her silver armor. A sudden idea. A few quick, sharp orders, and a couple of "props" had torn off the lay figure. Then the stage manager took Signora in his arms and lifted her on to the truck. He said nothing to her and she made no resistance.

She knew exactly what was expected of her. Resting her hands on her sword in front of her as a brace, she drew herself up and waited.

The chorus was beginning to act as if it saw something unusual up the river. It was crowding towards the shore and shouting, "Ein Schwan, Ein Schwan!" The stage manager flicked his handkerchief as a signal to the man on the truck, and a moment later Signora, drawn by the cotton swan, was sailing down the Scheldt. Nervous? Not a bit. It was the happiest moment of her life. And mounted on the big truck in the wings was "Jean," the Lohengrin of the evening, waving his hand to her.

VIII

UDELS' attitude towards Signora was that of simple worship. Whatever claims he might have on her, because it was he who found her at the stage door and took her in and harbored her, he never urged. An old Italian opera chorus singer, the prima donnas, tenors and other great artists were to him queens and princes; and when they made Signora practically one of themselves, she too became a queen in his eyes.

He was her very devoted slave. That he stood in any way in the relation to her of a father he never suggested. Authority over her he never thought to exert. The very first night, when she so unceremoniously entered the opera house, she had lain in the

lap of the great prima donna, Mme. Caravé. From that moment she had seemed to Yudels immeasurably above him. He worshipped her and tended her with loving care—but very much as a body-guard would a princess royal.

To her he simply was Yudels. It was Yudels this, Yudels that, just as with the other members of the various mechanical departments of the opera house. If there was anything she wanted to do, she did it. She never stopped to ask him about it. Yet he was ever watching over her like a faithful servitor. She flitted elfishly in and out—from room to room, from fly gallery to fly gallery without restraint. But the faithful Yudels always knew where she was and what she was doing, and ever was watching that no harm came to her. Yet that she was in the least degree responsible to him never entered her little head nor his big one.

I do not suppose I could give a better idea of how completely Signora grew up to be part of the life behind the scenes of the

opera house, than by harking back several years, and telling what occurred the first time she ever was taken outdoors. Possibly this would be sufficiently indicated by the simple statement that she was far enough along to jab the "Siegfried" dragon and to ride the "Walküre" hobby horses before she even knew that there was such a thing as outdoors. But the fact is Yudels spent practically all his time in the opera house.

Perhaps it would be exaggerating to say that he never left it; but it almost seemed so. His whole world was that part of the building which lay behind the curtain. And why should he need another? He could wander through a royal palace or a mediæval dungeon; over a mountain fastness with distant views of Walhalla, or through a smiling landscape; along a Spanish bastion or a Flemish river; through an Egyptian temple or the grotto of the Venusberg. True, all these were mere painted drops and wings; but to him they had long since become part of a real world,

and one in which he felt very much at home and absolutely comfortable. For, no matter in what part of the globe he happened to be at the moment, he could drop into an old capacious leather-covered easy-chair, near the property room, and rest. If he went out into the real outdoors and it happened to storm, his umbrella might be blown inside out and he might get wet or cold. But if it stormed inside the opera house he was all right. The most violent wind was nothing more than a sound produced by the wind machine—a paddle wheel revolving against a piece of ribbed silk. The most vivid lightning was only flashed from a stereopticon, and the loudest and most threatening peal of thunder merely the thumping of the thunder box or the rolling of a few cannon balls down the trough of the "rabbit hutch." It was noisy but safe. And so he remained for a long period of his existence, part of a world which completely satisfied him and into which he fitted perfectly. The idea of leaving it, even temporarily, rarely occurred to him. Moreover

something always was going on there—rehearsing during the day and performances during the night, or, if no rehearsals or performances, the work of preparation. Scenery was being modelled and painted, properties devised, costumes designed and manufactured. A jack of all trades like Yudels might be called on any moment; and so no one thought it strange that Signora had never so much as poked her nose outdoors, and never expressed any wish to do so—no more than if she had known nothing about outdoors; which was exactly the case.

She could dance around in her "Carmen" costume; strut about in her "Lohengrin" armor; ride the "Walküre" horses; and lustily jab the dragon; but of any other world except of that behind the scenes she apparently never had heard. If she ever had learned of flowers other than those cut out of colored paper and attached to wire stems; trees other than those of painted canvas or cut in profile with paper leaves to make them look more natural; waves that worked

on hinges; or mountains, the heights of which were reached on ladders from the wings and crossed on "platforms"; nothing she ever said indicated the fact. Life behind the scenes of the opera house apparently was all she knew about. Yudels himself was so much a part of that life, or it was so much a part of him, it is doubtful if he ever had spoken to her about outdoors. She knew the moon merely as a light effect. If she wanted moonlight she pulled a rope which raised a round disc up to a circular hole in one of the drops, then she climbed up to the electric switchboard and turned on the "blues." If ever she stopped to consider that there might be a moon elsewhere she probably took it for granted that, wherever it might be, someone else pulled the rope and turned on the "blues." Had she any conception of the majesty of a storm? Probably not; but, if she ever thought of it at all, she must have conceived it simply as the result of a bigger stereopticon, a larger thunder box with a more powerful man to thump it, or a "rabbit hutch" with more

"And suddenly work the wind machine"

cannon balls and a longer zinc-lined trough. But whatever her ideas were on these subjects, providing she had any at all, no one knew; for it never occurred to anyone to inquire. More or less they were all creatures of the same world as she. It was bounded by four walls, but it was a pretty big world after all.

And so things went along with Signora until, of a warm afternoon, one spring, Yudels entered the wardrobe department and asked, much as if he was making a requisition for an operatic costume, for a child's hat and coat. They were quickly but inquiringly forthcoming. Yudels answered that he had ordered a carriage and intended to take Signora out to the park. Then for the first time, as the news was passed around behind the scenes, it was realized that Signora never had been beyond the painted world of the opera house. What would she think of outdoors?

When the carriage arrived she got into it much as she would into the back of the "Rheingold" serpent, and when the door

was closed after her, and the vehicle started off, she was, for all she knew, rehearsing a novel mechanical contrivance for a new opera. The motion was so swift that the objects flew past the small windows too rapidly for anything to become fixed in her mind.

Yudels had ordered the driver just where to stop after entering the park. The carriage pulled up at a knoll crowned by a rustic summer house. The old chorus singer carried Signora up the knoll in his arms and stood her on one of the benches. She looked on the prospect below, rubbed her eyes and then looked again. "Why, Yudels," she exclaimed, "the scene's all set for the first act. When does it begin? And look—all the trees are practical. But somehow they don't look as natural as those at the opera house. I wonder who cut out all those leaves? That must have been a job. And what big grass mats!"

In the dell was a lake. A pretty stiff breeze was blowing and kicking up a smart little sea. Suddenly Signora saw the lake.

"Yudels!" she exclaimed, "look at those waves! How do they work them? I don't see any hinges. Who does all this anyhow?"

Yudels was so accustomed to seeing new worlds created by scene painters, property masters, carpenters, and electricians that he was obliged to stop and think a moment. Even then he answered, with some hesitation, "It was—er—er—er—God, Signora."

"My!" she exclaimed with a ring of admiration in her voice, "What a stage manager he is! Why haven't I ever heard of him before?"

Yudels was spared the possible embarrassment of an explanation by the sudden appearance of a swan boat around a point of rock in the lake. Signora saw it at once. "Yudels," she cried out, "see, they are going to give 'Lohengrin.' There's the swan and the boat; but it can't be a dress rehearsal because Lohengrin hasn't his armor on."

In asking these questions she turned her head toward Yudels and in doing so saw a policeman coming along the path. "What character is that?" she asked, eagerly. "I

never saw that costume in any opera. And such a funny helmet!" Yudels explained: "Oh, he's not in the opera at all!"—"A policeman? And he looks after all the bad people?" "Is he a tenor, and are all the bad people baritones?"—"No!"—"But I thought all villains were baritones, and were killed by tenors. They are at the opera house."

Yudels took Signora by the hand, and together they strolled down the path, and further into the park. The child's exclamations, her comparison of what she saw with things as they were at the opera house, did not surprise him at all. He had lived so long in the world of the stage, that he himself looked at things much from the same point of view as Signora. To him, too, the trees in the park did not look as real as the trees in the opera house. The artificial was natural to her. She had grown up amid it, and this was her first glimpse at something else.

As they wandered along, they heard the strains of a barrel organ. Turning the corner Signora suddenly cried out, "Oh, there

are the 'Walküre' horses. They're teaching a lot of new boys and girls how to ride them. But why don't they play the 'Ride of the "Walküres"'?" That was how her first view of a merry-go-round impressed her. Near the merry-go-round stood a man with a bunch of red toy balloons fastened to a stick by short strings and floating buoyantly in the air. Signora stared at them with eyes even wider open than when she had first seen the wooden horses.

"What's the matter, Signora?" asked Yudels.

"Why, Yudels," she replied, pointing to the balloons, "did you ever see such big currants! Where do they grow them and why haven't we ever had any?"

Nothing would convince her that they were not currants, short of Yudels' buying one, letting her feel it, and sending it up in the air. She watched it ascend with wonderment. Yudels gave her a ride on the carousel, but she did not think it compared with sliding down an inclined platform in front of a cloud-drop, and on one of the

wooden "Walkūre" horses. And the barrel organ? She thought it vile. "Why don't they get our orchestra to come up here and play for them?" she asked.

Some statues which they saw in the course of their stroll puzzled her greatly. "Aren't they ugly," she exclaimed. "What kind of idols are they? What operas are they in? Do they leave them out all night? I should think if they got rained on, that brown paint would wash off." Yudels never had been obliged to answer so many questions or explain so much.

As he did not know how soon they might be outdoors again, he thought it just as well to prolong their stay. On a knoll a little way beyond the statues which Signora had thought so hideous (she did not know it but there were many who agreed with her), was a little place for eating. It commanded a pretty prospect, and there Yudels and Signora sat down at a table and had their supper. It was getting late but neither of them minded that. If it had been a "Carmen" night, nothing could have persuaded

Signora to go to bed before the end of the opera. And so they sat there till it grew dark, and the lights began to flicker along the walks and through the foliage.

Suddenly Yudels felt a little hand close tightly around his arm. With the other hand Signora was pointing. Yudels followed the direction. "Look, look," she cried. "They're beginning to hoist up the moon!"

He explained to her, that this was the real moon and was not hoisted. It rose in the heavens of its own accord. Signora stared at it, as the disc rose higher and fuller above the trees. It was not a very brilliant moon. Its orb was rather pale and watery.

"So that's the real moon?"

"Yes," said Yudels, "that's the real moon! What do you think of it?"

"I don't think it compares with our moon at the opera house," she answered very decidedly. "Ours has such a nice, bluish light."

Then Yudels concluded it was time to go home.

IX

SIGNORA never felt so big in her life as one autumn when she was told that she would be taken along with the company "on tour." She watched the scenery carted away, the properties being boxed and the costumes being stowed in huge trunks with intense interest, and was all agog with excitement during the many preparations for the tour, which was to extend across the entire continent.

"You will see Indians," said Planky.

"Will they scalp us?" she asked innocently.

"No," said Planky, "not unless we sing badly."

"Then, Planky," said Signora, her eyes full of mischief, "you had better have your head shaved," and she danced away laughing into the wings.

They made what seemed to Signora a very long run ; for they had to remain overnight in the train until they reached a large city, where they put up at a building which was even larger than the opera house in which Signora had spent the greater part of her life. It was an enormous hotel and a theatre all in one ; and through a private entrance the artists who lived at the hotel could go directly from it to the theatre in which they were to sing.

The artists were so glad to have the journey over that they soon threw off the strain of it and were in high spirits.

" It seems like being on terra firma again after a sea voyage," said Jean when he reached the hotel. He was in a rollicking mood and before the performance that night he played one of his characteristic tricks.

Some of the principals had preceded the main body of the company. They were those who were to appear in the opening performance. Among them was Madame Nortona, another famous American prima

donna, and so great a Wagner singer that she had been especially engaged by the great composer's widow to sing in some of the principal performances at Bayreuth. She was one of the greatest Brünnhildes and Isoldes on the stage, and she not only sang and acted these *rôles* superbly but she was a large, handsome women as well —an ideal impersonator of the characters.

The special pet of this Brünnhilde and Isolde was a small black French poodle named Taffy. Signora was in her room with her at the hotel when she was getting ready to leave it for the performance. Taffy was very restless, as he always was when he knew he was to be left behind. He ran to the door, looked appealingly up into his mistress's face and gave a series of short, sharp barks. Madame Nortona's attempts to pacify him were useless, and finally she and Signora slipped out of the door, shut it quickly behind them and locked it. As they walked down the corridor they could hear Taffy's bark growing fainter and fainter.

" One of the greatest ' Brünnhildes ' and ' Isoldes ' "

"Poor fellow," exclaimed Madame Nortona, "he is so lonely. It is a shame to leave him, but he would run out on the stage after me—and what would the audience say to see Brünnhilde followed about by a French poodle!"

She and Signora made their way to the prima donna's dressing-room. To their utter surprise, as they entered, they heard Taffy's bark from under the piano. It was short and sharp, apparently unmistakable. What dog but Taffy had a bark pitched in just that key? The prima donna was completely mystified. "Taffy, you naughty dog," she cried, "how did you get there? Come right out from under that piano this instant."

Then from under the instrument there crept on all fours none other than Jean, the great tenor, who had found it impossible to resist the temptation of playing one of his animal tricks on the great prima donna. Madame Nortona and Signora were convulsed, and Jean joined them in peals of laughter after he had risen to his feet.

On this tour Jean and Edouard were, as always, inseparable. When the artists wanted to limber up their voices or do a little rehearsing they went from the hotel to the theatre dressing-rooms, and soon Signora was roaming around there with as much freedom as in her opera house home. The two brothers usually began the day's work playing jokes on each other. One morning Signora strolled into their dressing-room. Jean had just struck a chord on the piano. Edouard sang a phrase. Jean sprang to his feet apparently in great indignation. "Bah, Edouard," he exclaimed, "you sing like a pig this morning!"

Edouard pushed him aside, sat down at the piano himself and struck a chord. Jean sang a phrase. Edouard was on his feet in an instant. "Bah, Jean," he exclaimed, "you sing like a pig this morning!" Then they both turned to Signora. "There is no hope for either of us," Jean said to her. "No," continued Edouard, "we shall never make a success in grand opera. Do you think, Signora, that

if I went around with a hand-organ, and had Jean do his monkey tricks, we could make a living?" Then both laughed and went to work seriously. Thus did the greatest Tristan and greatest Wotan begin their day's rehearsal.

About a fortnight later the special train on which the company traveled brought them to a Southern city in which there was no theatre large enough for their performances. When they were taken to the place where the operas were to be given they found it was a large tabernacle, with solid pews which could not be removed. Part of the stage and the dressing-rooms had been built over the tops of the pews, and the workmen were just then engaged in piling up hymn-books in an out-of-the-way place behind the scenes.

The audience began arriving and seating itself in the pews. As Signora peeped through a slit in the curtain she noticed that a great many young women wore broad blue ribbon badges with gold lettering. She called the stage manager's attention to

it, and his curiosity was sufficiently aroused for him to make inquiries. He came back grinning. "What do you think?" he said; "one of the wealthy men of the place has bought up part of the house and has reserved it for the most popular school-teachers chosen by vote here and in the neighboring towns and villages. Those badges read, 'Grand Opera at the Tabernacle—Caravé as Carmen—To show how much you are loved at home!'

"Then, Signora," he continued, "do you see that cloth stretched in front of part of the gallery? It really is very touching. The same man has bought up part of the gallery and presented the seats to the blind boys and girls in one of the asylums here. As they are blind they could not see the stage, anyhow, so he has had that part of the gallery curtained off in order that people won't stare at them as if they were animals, instead of paying attention to the performance. I think the man who is giving those poor young people such a treat deserves a medal. But, do you know, I heard some-

thing funny, too. A boy was going upstairs to the gallery when an usher shouted after him: 'Heh, there, you, young feller! Where ye'r goin' to? You's ain't blind!' It all seems such a queer mixture with grand opera."

Signora often had seen Caravé shudder at the dropping of her hand-glass in her dressing-room, and not recover from her apprehension until she found that it was not broken. Time and time again on this tour the child saw evidence of the great prima donna's superstitions. Attached to a chain around her neck she wore a Hindu amulet made of a blue stone. Often when talking with Signora she would hold this amulet up to the light and exclaim: "Ah! you see the rays come through. It will be a lucky day." Or, "It is opaque. There is bad luck in store for me." Then if everything passed off well she would say, "You see it all comes out according to the amulet"; but if she had predicted ill-luck and nothing untoward happened she would say nothing. Like other superstitious

people, she made much of everything that came out according to her predictions, but kept quiet when they were not fulfilled.

Her principal amusements on nights when she was not singing, or when she was not behind the scenes listening to others, was to hold spiritualistic séances. It did not transpire at these that there was any one in particular in the spirit world regarding whom she wanted to make inquiries. She seemed interested in a general way in finding out what was going on there, and it fitted in with her mystic character. For there was a dash of the weird in Caravé's make-up.

One evening in one of the large cities she sent for Signora to come to her room. She was very much excited. "Signora," she exclaimed, "there is a splendid medium in this city. I have sent for him. He is coming here this evening. We will have a grand séance. I want you to take word to all the members of the company who are not singing to come to my room. I would not have them miss it for the world."

As a result, Signora, the American prima donna (not Madame Nortona, but "Mrs. Emma"), Jean and Edouard and Planky met in Caravé's room at the hotel at the appointed hour. The lights were burning low, there was a heavy odor of incense, and on the table she had a hideous idol. They seated themselves about the room, Caravé occupying a large chair back of the table and opposite the door, toward which she gazed with a rapt, expectant look. No one spoke, for Caravé seemed to want silence.

Five minutes passed, then ten, then half an hour; the medium had not arrived. Madame Caravé's guests were becoming a little uneasy. They were not accustomed to sit still so long. She, however, remained silent, still rapt and expectant. Another quarter of an hour passed. Then Caravé herself began to show signs of impatience. She tapped with her foot on the floor.

"Perhaps," suggested Signora, "if it is a spirit it may have come in through the key-hole, and be here without our knowing it."

Planky, who was sitting next to Signora, pinched her arm to make her keep quiet. To avenge herself she whispered into his ear: "Do you think when the séance begins, if it ever does, the spirit will say, 'We know even up there that Planky and "Mrs. Emma" have "ze two most beautiful noses in ze company?"'" Planky couldn't help a broad smile, and Caravé punished him with a frown.

The medium was now an hour late. The lights were still burning low; there was still a faint odor of incense, but even Caravé was not as rapt and expectant in her attitude as she had been. Finally Jean ventured to ask: "Madame Caravé, what is the name of the medium you are expecting?"

"Moses."

"The real Moses?"

"No, Monsieur Jean, the Moses who lives in this town. Perhaps you will go down to the hotel desk and find out why he has not come."

"Did they give you his address, Madame?"

"No; I did not ask it. They said he was a great medium, so I wrote to him and had the letter mailed."

"And how did you address it, Madame?"

"Oh, just 'Moses.'"

"And you think he will come?"

"Certainly."

"I do not think so, Madame, and, as it is now getting quite late, allow me to suggest that we have something more substantial than a spirit and that you all join me at supper. After that my brother Edouard, who, as you know, imitates the sounds of instruments so beautifully will show you how Pfeiffenschneider plays the trombone in the death scene in the 'Götterdämmerung.'" Then the lights were turned up and the spiritualistic séance was over.

On this tour Signora became better acquainted with some members of the company than she had been at the Opera House. In the close quarters of the special train she naturally was brought in closer contact with them. Madame Nortona, for instance, took the child on her lap one day, and, while

the train was speeding through sugar-cane plantations on its way from the South to the far West, told her something of her own career—how she (remember, she now was one of the greatest prima donnas) had made her début with Gilmore's band, the band master handing her up to the platform with the encouraging remark, "Now, little girl, don't be afraid; sing right out;" and how when she decided to go on the operatic stage she had studied in Italy and first sung in a theatre in a little Italian town during a winter season when her dressing-room was so cold that she had to carry a brazier of charcoal with her from her lodgings. She also told Signora that when she had advanced enough to sing in London she had been asked to learn one of the greatest *rôles* in opera, Valentine, in "Les Huguenots," in less than a week; and how Jean and Edouard, who were in the company, had helped her get through the great duet, in which even an experienced singer's excitement is apt to run away with her—how Edouard stood in the wings by the

window, and called out, whenever she went over to his side of the stage, "Non si allegro!" while Jean would whisper, when she was singing with him, "Pas si vite!" so that she would not reach the climax too soon.

Then there was Madame Lembrich, one of the greatest singers of brilliant *rôles*. She had been most fortunate at the outset of her career in marrying a thorough musician, Professor Klengl, who had watched over her voice like a nurse over a baby, and had never allowed her to study a *rôle* which might impair its flexibility and beauty. He had merged his own career completely in hers, and even had hyphenated her name with his; his visiting-cards reading "Professor Guillaume Klengl-Lembrich,"

One day Madame Lembrich took Signora into her compartment. "Do you know," she said to her during their chat, "who my severest critic is? Klengl. He is in the audience every time I sing, and after every act he comes into my dressing-room. The moment I look at his face I can tell whether

he has been satisfied with me or not. You know he has a very long nose. If that nose looks the same as usual, I have been doing all right. If it looks extra long then I know I am going to get a scolding. Yes, Klengl's nose always has been my artistic barometer. It is a great thing for a prima donna to have a husband with a long nose."

A great favorite with the company, because she was so chic and pretty, was a young German singer. Her real name was Fritzi Schiff, but she was so tantalizingly arch and coquettish that by way of pleasantry they called her "Shifty Fritz."

The company also included, beside Madame Nortona and "Mrs. Emma," a bright young American singer, named Susan Adam, who sometimes amused herself riding on a locomotive.

Then there was an excellent French tenor, a most graceful Romeo and Faust. His name was Galèza, and like most French artists, although he had been in this country several seasons, he spoke English very imperfectly. In the South of France he had

"Shifty Fritz"

a farm, of which he was very proud, and when he tried to explain to Signora how plentifully it was supplied with live stock he would exclaim enthusiastically, "Ah, yes, Signora, it ees very cow, very sheep, very pig!"

The conductor of the German operas was a good-looking and popular young fellow, whom everybody called by his first name, Walter. Each car on the special train was lettered, and the artists were assigned to their cars by these letters. One day when the company was boarding the train, Walter was seen parading up and down the platform with an enormous placard, "Car B." When Signora asked him what he was up to, he replied with mock seriousness, "I am the conductor."

Planky also was in his element on this tour. Usually a crowd of curiosity-seekers gathered at the station when the company was leaving. As the train drew out Planky usually stood on the steps of his car, and, with one of his grand gestures, let his voice roll out for the benefit of the awe-struck crowd.

X

GRADUALLY as the special train got farther West the settlements became fewer and fewer until the train reached the Great American Desert, where there were only small way stations in the midst of a dreary plain. Sometimes even these small stations were so far apart that the train would have to stop at a water tank, right in the midst of the desert, without any settlement in sight. Then all the members of the company would get out and stretch their legs. Caravé, whose spirits were irrepressible, would begin dancing the "Habénera" or the "Seguidilla" out on the plain, or the company would start an impromptu performance for the benefit of the train hands. When the engineer blew the whistle there was a lively scramble for the cars,

and it was amusing to see big men like Edouard and Planky, who usually walked the stage with majestic stride, making a race for the platform.

With the company was a German tenor, a capital Siegfried and very good as Lohengrin. On one of the stops in the desert a family of pigs approached the train, and, after gazing at the unusual sight, quietly continued rooting for food. What it was that the German tenor found so attractive in this pig family no one ever has been able to find out, but he became so lost in contemplation of the porkers that the engineer had to whistle three times before the tenor awoke from his reverie. While he was standing there the librarian of the company, Lionel Mapleson, who always had his camera handy, took a snapshot, which afterward was passed around to the great amusement of all, and received the title, "Siegfried and the American Dragons."

One of the wags of the company was an American baritone who originally had been in the dry-goods business in Philadelphia.

His fame rested chiefly on his remarkably vivid performances of Wagnerian *rôles* like Telramund in "Lohengrin" and Kurwenal in "Tristan," in which he was unexcelled. His name was Grispham, and after he had made his reputation he used to recall, with great glee, a remark passed upon him by an old Quaker merchant of Philadelphia. While he was still in the dry-goods business he passed this merchant's store, and the merchant remarked to a bystander: "There goes that fellow Grispham. He'll never amount to much. He spends too much time with those singing people."

If, on one of the stops in the desert, there happened to be a hand-car around, Grispham would jump on it and start off for a ride down the road. Once in the dead of night the train came to a full stop. It was pitch-dark outside and there was absolute silence. The effect of the train's stopping after the dreary ride through the desert, the feeling that there was nothing around them but an unending stretch of barren plain, the blackness without, and the silence, caused a

feeling of fear to descend upon the operatic artists, so sensitive to every strange phenomenon. Imagine their fright when there was a sudden howl on the plain and a voice rang through the cars, "We're held up by cowboys!"

There was a scramble on the part of every one to hide valuables under mattresses and cushions; and then a wild shriek as a figure appeared at the door of one of the cars—a figure surmounted by a sombrero whose broad brim cast a shadow over the cowboy highwayman's face, while he pointed a pistol at the cowering group. Where was the brave Tristan then? or the peerless Lohengrin? or Rhadames, who, in his day, in Egypt, had put a whole army of Ethiopians to flight? All trembling at the muzzle of—a brass key.

For it dawned upon them that it was not a pistol at all in the highwayman's hand, and that the highwayman himself bore a striking resemblance to the baritone who came from the peaceful city of Philadelphia. Then the tension relaxed, and they all made a rush for him. But he dashed down the

steps and out into the darkness, where he stood giving them Alberich's mocking laugh from "Siegfried." After this episode Mr. David Grispham, baritone, always was known as "Arizona Dave."

Meanwhile other members of the company, who had not been held up by "Arizona Dave," had scrambled out of the cars, and with the aid of lanterns had heaped up a lot of dead cactus and set fire to it. Flames were leaping up through the quiet night and illuminating the desert. Suddenly into the lurid light there sprang a small, lithe figure that began dancing around the fire. It was Berteri, the ballet master. A few minutes later some of the ballet girls joined him, and then was seen such a fire dance as never had been witnessed in the Great American Desert. The artists and chorus formed a circle around the dancers and watched the scene, with its weird light effects. They had found out that a bridge ahead of them had broken down, and that there would be a wait of five or six hours; so they kept up the performance, and dawn was breaking

before the dancers stopped and they all walked back to the train.

As they approached it one of the car windows was opened. There, sitting up in her berth and looking out at them with a broad grin, was the German prima donna, who had slept peacefully through the whole experience, hold-up and all.

"Guten Morgen, Carrie!" she called out when they came within hailing distance.

Afterward they got Grispham with his sombrero, and aiming at an imaginary object with his key pistol, to pose for a snapshot, which they called "Making a Hit."

Near the bridge was a little telegraph station. The bridge crossed a stream called the Pecos River. The telegraph operator was also Justice of the Peace, and over the station he had the comprehensive sign, "All the law West of the Pecos."

As he rarely saw any one at his lonely outpost save a few cowboys and Indians, the night performance of the operatic company around the fire was a new and exciting experience for him. He was so elated that

before the company continued he presented Caravé with a cat. The prima donna now had quite a menagerie. She was the possessor of a parrot which occasionally used language more remarkable for expressiveness than elegance; of a monkey which numbered among its accomplishments a taste for smoking cigarettes; and now the cat, which during the rest of the tour bothered the company by straying away on various occasions and making it necessary for an exciting chase to be held.

This menagerie of Caravé's led to one of her remarks that nearly convulsed the company. They had arrived on the Pacific Coast and had been giving performances a fortnight. Somehow the change of climate had not entirely agreed with the prima donna, and she was inclined to be a trifle moody. She complained about everything —the orchestra was out of tune, the stage was draughty, the scene was badly set, the audiences were not as dressy as they ought to be when she, Caravé, sang.

"Ah, Madame," Planky interposed one

"Caravé and her dog"

evening, "you exaggerate. The weather is bad and you are not well. When the sun shines again you will be all right. But, anyhow," he continued banteringly, "you should marry. You should have a husband to cheer you up in bad weather and when you are low-spirited."

"A husband!" sneered the prima donna. "Why should I need a husband? I have a monkey that smokes, a parrot that swears, and a cat that stays out all night. Could you do better than that, Planky?"

On the return trip across the continent the company took a different route and their stops were at larger cities. They had no impromptu dances in the dead of night around burning cactus in the Great American Desert; nor did they have any experience with "All the law West of the Pecos." Fortunately, also, no admirer took it into his head to add to Caravé's menagerie. There was, however, some excitement in the course of the long journey west, in which live stock was concerned.

The Italian chorus being composed of

people of somewhat singular habits had a car on the special train to itself. It was recognized that no citizen of another nationality could possibly have survived a whiff of the garlic-laden air in which the Italian chorus fairly reveled.

Its members were a frugal lot and had carefully laid in a stock of provisions to last them half way across the continent. They had, besides garlic, various malodorous cheeses, and, most extraordinary of all, crates of live fowl which they stowed away in one end of the car, decapitating the unfortunate birds as appetite demanded.

One day there was a great hullabaloo in the Italian chorus car. Fearing that a vendetta had broken loose, some of the men from the other cars made a hasty invasion of "Little Italy on Wheels." They found that the commotion had been caused by a chorister, who had killed three of his precious fowl and then put the bodies in cold storage on top of the ice in the water-cooler. Even the Italian chorus, which had patiently endured much, found this liberty quite beyond them.

One morning the company arrived in a large city in which, on the same evening, they were to give a performance in an enormous convention hall, with a seating capacity of twenty-five thousand. When they reached the hall about eleven o'clock in the morning they discovered a startling condition of affairs.

It was Monday, and up to the previous Saturday night the great hall had been used for a horse show. Now, except that the horses had been removed, the building was in exactly the same condition as when the show had closed. The floor was covered with tanbark and much of the building was divided into stalls—not orchestra stalls, but horse stalls. No stage, no proscenium, not a thing for handling the scenery had been provided, and there was not a seat to be found in the whole house.

The problem that presented itself was to dig out the horse show, convert the hall into an opera house and have everything ready for "Carmen" in the evening.

Thirty mule carts and their colored

drivers were soon brought into requisition to rake up and dig out the tanbark and cart it away. Meantime the expert stage hands, who always accompanied the troupe, were up on the iron girders, extemporizing a rigging loft for working the scenery; and carpenters were putting up the stage and a set of dressing-rooms, which resembled a row of bathing-houses at a second-rate summer resort.

While this was in progress a host of women went to work at sewing-machines, sewing huge strips of canvas together until they had made a carpet large enough to spread over the vast floor space and cover the last remnants of the horse show, which even the thirty mule carts and their drivers, with all their efforts, had been unable completely to obliterate. Then nine thousand chairs were put in place on the floor and in the galleries—and the convention hall which had been occupied by a horse show was finally pronounced to be ready for "Carmen."

Signora enjoyed the performances which

took place in college towns. During the day there was always a lot of students in line at the stage door, eager for a chance to go on as "supers" in the evening. They did it purely for the fun of the thing, and were always delighted when told that they could report for rehearsal an hour before the performance in the evening. When they had dressed themselves in the costumes provided, they came down on the stage, and there the "super captain" quickly drilled them in the various processions, and instructed them as to the "business" which would be required of them.

In a certain way it was saving to employ these students, and they were an apt lot and had a fresh and eager appearance, quite different from the professional "super," who usually is a forlorn individual, with spindle shanks and of anything but a martial or dignified appearance. The students went through the opera with great vim, and after a stage battle, in which they participated, there always remained a few casques and weapons on the floor as evidence of the

carnage. The only trouble about employing the students was their insatiable fondness for carrying off "props" to their rooms, as souvenirs of their appearances in grand opera. Anything they could lay their hands on and tuck under their coats was apt to disappear, in spite of all the watchfulness of the property master and the regular stage hands.

One night the company gave "Faust" in Boston and, as usual in that intellectual city, there was a band of Harvard students for "supers." It was a star performance. Caravé was Marguerite; Jean was in the title *rôle;* Planky was Mephistopheles. It was a great night and the audience was most enthusiastic. After the performance, however, the property master was prancing around the stage calling down maledictions upon the head of the stage manager for having engaged a lot of mischievous students as "supers." A breastplate had been discovered to be missing from the outfit of one of the soldiers, and who but a student "super," he indignantly demanded, could possibly have carried it off?

Finally, when the property master had used up the English language, he started out with Planky and Signora for the hotel. As they were crossing the common there suddenly hove in sight a being wearing a breastplate, which flashed brilliantly in the light of the electric lamps in the middle of the green.

As the property master was not a New Englander he did not mistake the apparition for one of the Puritan fathers come to life. He promptly made a grab for the breastplate. A moment later one of the students who had been acting as "super" at the performance, and who, in his desire to get away with the spoils, had daringly fastened the breastplate over his overcoat, had wriggled out of it and was sprinting across the common leaving the property master in triumphant possession of the lost armor—which he proudly carried back to the theatre.

XI

ONE night, some time after the company's return, Yudels was awakened by a sense of something unusual. The door of his little apartment was open, and a bluish light seemed to have diffused itself through the house. Softly he got out of bed, stepped out on the fly gallery, and looked down. What he saw startled him. Far below on the stage, was a slender figure moving rapidly, yet always about the same spot. Yes, it was Signora. But what was she doing down there all alone? Yudels was not long in deciding to find out for himself.

He dressed hastily, and descended cautiously, and without making any noise, so that he remained unnoticed. Reaching the stage, he stood back within the deep shadow of the wall, and watched the girl. Evidently, she had gotten out of bed, had come down and turned on all the blue lights—the moon effect. The garden scene of "Tristan

und Isolde" had remained set after an evening's rehearsal, and well out on the stage, under the overhanging bough of a tree, Signora was dancing, while softly singing to herself snatches from "Carmen," the waltz from "Faust," bits from the ballet music of "Les Huguenots," and other tunes that could be danced to.

Yudels ascended the steps leading to the balcony of King Mark's palace (from which Isolde had waved her veil to the approaching Tristan). There he could remain hidden from view and watch the proceedings. Signora seemed to have chosen a certain spot as a centre. Now she would glide up to it, and then back; then with graceful little steps, circle around it, all the time with a pretty waving of the arms or inclination of the head or body, as if dancing with, and singing to, an unseen partner. Yudels was fascinated. Her dancing was a revelation. Such grace, such buoyancy, never had been seen on the stage of the opera house. She seemed almost an airy nothing, a sylvan sprite in the moonlight. Now she would

raise her long snow-white night robe a little, so that her feet flashed from beneath it, as she gaily went tripping forward; now she dropped it as she glided back; then it gathered about her in folds as she circled gracefully around. Whatever she did there was a marvellous symmetry about it all, for as she danced, she was a lithe, whip-like figure, that thrilled responsively all over with the slightest gesture or least change of rhythm in the dance.

As Yudels watched her she suddenly stopped dancing and singing, and with a coquettish toss of the head began talking. She was looking down, and now that Yudels followed her look and words, he realized that she had been dancing with her own shadow for a moonlight partner. That accounted for her dancing about the spot where her shadow fell most distinctly, approaching it till it almost vanished beneath her feet, then retreating until it became as large as herself.

"Ah, little shadow!" she exclaimed, "how good of you to come to-night. So you knew

I had no playmate, and was lonely, and you have come to play with me. That is very sweet of you. And you will stay till the moon goes down? That won't be till I tell it to. It is my moon and does what I want it to—just like Jean and Edouard and Planky and Yudels, and all the rest. They all do just what I want them to. I will give you a lesson in singing and dancing." Then she danced forward, and the shadow gradually grew smaller. "Oh, you are hiding, are you? Are you afraid I might scold you?" (retreating) "No! There you are again. And so you want to know who I am? I am only 'Signora.' I've never stopped to think what else. I don't know whether my mother was Brünnhilde, or Marguerite, or Elsa, or Juliette, or Carmen,—(singing) 'Près les Remparts de Seville'—but I think she must have been Carmen. Ha-ha-ha-ha! I'm telling you a story. I never had a mother except Yudels, and he's only a sort of father.

"You have no mother, either, little shadow, have you? You are like me. That is

why I love you. Now let us dance and sing!"

She circled lightly around. By and by she yawned. "Shadow mine, it is growing late and I am tired. I will take a little nap. Good night, my playmate. Come again whenever you see that I have turned on the moon. Good night, my pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty shadow!"

Signora, still tripping a dancing measure, drew back to the seat under the tree where Tristan and Isolde had sung their love duet. She sat there a few moments, her hands clasped, and resting on her knees as if she were thinking. Then she yawned again, and stretching herself out on the grass mat that covered the seat, and resting her head against some stuffed canvas rocks that were as soft as cushions, she closed her eyes and fell sound asleep.

Yudels came down the steps, tip-toed across the stage to the property room, where he took a rich purple velvet cover, which was draped over a throne, and returning to where Signora lay asleep, spread it over her. After

switching off the moon, he himself lay down on a couch in the property room, and also went to sleep.

Whether Signora was surprised or not when she awoke Yudels never knew. He was not present at that interesting moment, for he slept longer than she did. Nor did he refer in any direct way to what he had witnessed, though Signora must have known from finding herself so well tucked up on the garden seat that he had discovered her.

But Yudels would as soon have been the first to speak to a prima donna about something he had accidentally learned about her. He adored Signora, but he also stood in awe of her. Had she wished she might have been as pettish and impulsive and as unbearable as a spoiled child. But her whims like this last one all were artistic. Yudels himself had the artistic temperament. He recognized it in Signora—in every motion of the body, every gesture; in her absorption of everything she saw going on behind the scenes; in the way she looked at a scene or listened to a strain of music; in

the artless grace of every pose; in the beautiful modulations of her speaking voice; and in the expression she unconsciously put into everything she sang—and, while she flitted about the opera house, she sang pretty much everything she had heard, with a feeling all her own too, not merely imitating what she had heard others do.

Yudels listened to her with all his ears. He had hopes, which he breathed to no one, that in this girlish, elusive, elfish child was one of the great prima donnas of the future. He realized what no one else behind the scenes of the opera house did, that Signora was absorbing by association, was breathing in, as it were, what others required years of study to learn. She lived in music, she breathed it, she exhaled it. It might be "Die Walküre," "Les Huguenots," "Carmen," "Faust," "Lucia"—whatever it was it made no difference to her. It was second nature to her. Her voice was childish, but it was pure and absolutely true. Once established she could go on the stage equipped as no other singer, for all schools of opera

would be her's by nature and absorption. That was one reason Yudels treated her with a certain degree of reverence. Removed from him in innate breeding as she evidently was, he still might have sought to exercise some authority over her. But no; he already saw her a queen of opera, a great prima donna, and true to his old-time operatic instincts, he worshiped her.

To Signora her being in the opera house seemed perfectly natural. She never asked anyone why she was there or why Yudels looked after her. Many people had come and gone even in her brief time. She never concerned herself about whence they came or whither they went. They were simply parts of that great thing known to her as Opera and around which her world revolved. She did just whatever she wanted to. If she sang or climbed up on the Siegfried dragon; dressed up as Lohengrin; watched scenery modelled or painted and all kinds of curious props being made; chatted familiarly with the great singers—it was because she wanted to. For every one

was only too glad to have her do just what she wanted to, since, always, it was something connected with opera.

When Yudels saw Signora the morning after he had watched her dancing with her own shadow, he asked her to come with him to the room where the ballet rehearsals were held. As they entered, Berteri, the ballet master, a small, swarthy, agile looking man, in a blue sweater, baggy black trousers, and slippers, was listening to the claims of several applicants for places in the ballet.

"Now Mr. Berteri," said a statuesque young woman sailing up to him, "I'm a cloak model, and I've used up nearly all my lunch hour waiting to see you and I've got to go. But I just want to tell you that the next time I come I'll bring a friend o' mine, a manicure. Me and she want to go into the ballet together. She's a grand waltzer and her hair's great—blonde, no dye. Ta ta, Berti!"

"Before I begin," said an artificial Titian beauty, as she came forward with a smirk, "will my name appear on the programme?

No? Then there's no use of my telling you what I can do. But you don't know what you're losing." With a disdainful toss of the head she left.

A lithe young girl, not far on in her teens and evidently foreign, most likely French, advanced with an air of confidence, which somehow did not seem out of place. Berteri looked her over, and then without a question rapped smartly on a chair with a very much frayed rattan, and counted out "Un, deux, trois!" She jumped lightly in the air, landed on her toes, swayed gracefully, kicked with correctly flattened foot, spun around, and, as she made a curtsey, giggled breathlessly, "I'd rathaire dance zan eat!"

"Report at ten to-morrow. And you too," added Berteri addressing a woman in black, who looked as if she might grow younger if she were a little better taken care of. "I remember you. Don't you?" he asked, turning, to Yudels. Then he added, as the two women went away, "Great pity. It's Melissa. In her day, magnifique. Bad husband, much babies, but still very

good. O. K. for ze back row. Pick up in looks again when she get back the dancing. It ees life to her!"

A huge creature now approached the ballet master. "My dear Berteri," she said patronizingly, "I've lost three pounds since Saturday. At that rate I'll be ready in a month. I came just to let you know. Be sure to keep a place for me. Let me balance the front row."

"Ze front row!" murmured Berteri. "She would hide ze rest of ze stage."

"I suppose you will know me as soon as you read my paste-board," said a flashily dressed girl, handing a card to Berteri.

"Yes, mees, you are ze acrobatic danseuse."

"Me and my partner are doin' a 'sister act' in the continuous. We're tired of it. We wants to break in here. We'd like the society. We won't have to follow an educated pig or a lot o' trained monkeys, or a monologue that's been runnin' till it's tired."

"But what is zere for you here?"

"I read in the papes how the ballet here

weren't up to date. Now me an' my partner can fix that all right. How would a cake walk in 'Aida' strike you? That's a burnt cork opera, ain't it?—Oh yer don't see it, eh? Well, I say you're a nice lobster, y' are, to be puttin' on grand opera!"

This was too much even for Berteri, who was accustomed to all kinds of applicants. He turned to the others who were waiting. "Ladies, I will let you know when to come again. I must begin rehearsal."

"Now, ladies, rehearsal!" Berteri called to the ballet after the others had filed out slowly and regretfully. There was a rustle of gauze as about half the girls came forward, their short, stiff, umbrella-like practice skirts bobbing like fan-tails with every step. Of the others, some were seated and bending over, as they took a few last stitches in a rent stocking, skirt or bodice. Others were munching pieces of cake. Two of the girls were feeding each other on bananas. Several were standing in a group, too intent on chatter to hear the ballet master's

summons. One was sitting in the window sunning herself like a grasshopper.

Berteri waited a moment, and then rapped smartly with his rattan. The group was on its feet in an instant; a gulp and a swallow from the belated lunchers; a sudden straightening up on the part of the girls who were chatting, and the corps de ballet noiselessly glided into place. It was done so quickly and with such light steps, they seemed hardly to touch the ground.

Such a collection of costumes! Their only uniformity was in the professional smile, the short, stiff, umbrella-like skirts and little white pantalettes that were gathered at the knee by a tape elastic. Stockings? Some wore heavy black-ribbed ones, others pink or blue, striped or checked. Shirtwaists of various colors, dressing-sacks, kimonos and even a walking-jacket were included in some of the costumes. What a difference between this queer assortment of girls and the houris and coryphées of the stage. Here were the butterflies of grand opera still in the cocoon state. If

some one had shouted fire at three A. M. and they had tumbled into odd bits of clothing nearest at hand, the result hardly could have been more ludicrous, especially as most of them had their hair done up in curlpapers.

Berteri called the roll. The girls stood up in a row leaving a place in the middle for him. All clasped hands. Berteri nodded to a long-distance pianist, a short, round, greasy individual who, half munching, half chewing a stogie, sat in his shirt-sleeves at an upright piano, the key-board of which was streaked with yellow from his nicotine-stained fingers. He made a dive at the keyboard, and at a sharp "avancez ensemble" from Berteri, the girls kicked their way forward with him in an intricate step.

The ballet master broke away from the line and faced his pupils, who fell back and let go hands while they waited for his next command. There were no new steps to be learned, but the ballet has to be rehearsed every day to keep limbered up.

"Premières!"

Four girls stepped out from the row. There were girls of various nationalities in the ballet, and Berteri's orders were given in a picturesque variety of tongues—Italian, French, English.

"Piegare!—Curtsey! Posizione per prendere le pirouette. Ah, there, you! Balancez! Cannot you learn to stand wizout swaying?—Arabesque! Now, now! Entre chat—ze cat's jump! Body sideways. Ah, too stiff! More like you have oil in ze knees and ankles. To dance is a language. Speak wiz ze feets, ladies! Speak wiz ze feets! Changements! Voila!" He himself danced a few agile steps to show them what he meant.

"'Carmen'!"

The pianist drove into Bizet's ballet music while the girls made a dash for the tambourines that lay about on chairs and tables and on top of the piano. One of the girls set the little cymbals in her tambourine tinkling by giving the pianist a rap over his head with the instrument, and tripped lightly away giggling, while the pianist,

unable to leave his seat went on playing, but followed her retreating form with a look half savage, half sentimental.

"Ladees! not so much skies make, or what you call zem, skylarks!" called out Berteri disapprovingly. "Avancez ensemble! Pas de bourré! Faster! You are ze Spanish cigarette girl, not ze German peasant. Faster! Plus vite! Un, deux, trois!" he shouted, while he beat the chair furiously with his frayed rattan. At last he rushed into the circling lines and seizing a tambourine from one of the girls made them quicken their steps by setting them an example, his swarthy face and blue sweater bobbing up and down amid the variegated assortment of costumes.

"'Tannhausaire!' Premières huit!" he shouted.

Eight of the ballet girls came forward and the pianist started up the Venusberg scene. Berteri got in among the girls, clapped his hands and led them forward, backward and this way and that, showing them all kinds of graceful arm movements, beckoning,

motioning away and holding up the arms, during a long interlude, until every gesture, every vibration of the body, every step seemed wedded to music, and every girl began to express herself with hands, arms, legs, feet and body. Meanwhile he shouted, "Chassez a droit! Repetez a gauche. Avancez ensemble! Speak wiz ze feets!"

When Berteri had dismissed the ballet, Yudels stepped up to speak to him. Signora knew just why he had taken her into rehearsal, and just what he intended saying to Berteri. Also she knew just what Berteri would say. Often she had seen the ballet master following approvingly, with his eyes, her antics behind the scenes. Berteri listened to Yudels while Signora smiled to herself.

"Yudels," answered Berteri, "you are a singer, but of ze dance artistic you know nozzings—nozzings, or you would know that Signora she know how to dance wizout ze leçon or rehearsal. She just watch and she know. Show him Signora." Then turning to the pianist who was struggling into his coat

and still munching and smoking a stogie, he shouted "Encore 'Tannhausaire!'"

Signora had risen and come forward. At the first sound of music she began the "Tannhäuser" ballet which is not a dance at all, but the expression in motion, partly of sensuous languor, partly of unrestrained passion. Now she inclined her supple torso backward, now she leaned sideways, her neck arched so as to give her head a listening poise; now she circled or glided forward; now she described graceful curves with every motion of head, limb or body. She was like a Greek statue of a young girl come to life. Her feet were feathers. She trod on air. She was poetry in motion.

Had Yudels not seen her the previous night, dancing in the moonlight on the stage, this performance would have been a revelation to him. But however had she learned "Tannhäuser"? Moreover it was more than "Tannhäuser," for to the usual steps and poses she had added numerous little expressive gestures and steps, like grace notes in a melody. Even Yudels could see

that they were improvements and the result of a marvellous artistic temperament. The scene over, Signora flitted away with no more ado than if what she had done were an everyday affair.

"How long have you been teaching her?" asked Yudels of the ballet master.

"No leçon; not one leçon. She has seen and she has learned just as she does wiz everyzing about opera. Dance in ze ballet? Whenevaire she wants to. Non! Non! She need nevaire rehearse. It would spoil nature. She is a genius. She speaks wiz ze feets!"

XII

AFTER this Signora danced with the ballet whenever she wanted to, which was not very often. For she knew that the greatest thing in opera was the voice, not the feet. That she could dance might be a great and astounding discovery to Yudels but she had known it long before. Moreover she had the great singers for her companions. The ballet, to her, consisted of the small fry. She had no use for the premières quatre, the première huits or even the prima donna ballerina, let alone the "comparsi" or "rats." But occasionally, when she felt like limbering up or throwing herself into a mad whirl, she donned costume and dashed in when the dancing reached its climax.

Some time after Signora passed out of her childhood there were some changes in

the company. It had been like a great family, but now several strange elements were introduced. There had been previous seasons when Madame Caravè had remained abroad to rest. But she had come back again the next year, or at least within a couple of years. But she had announced her intention of remaining abroad a longer period this time. She had been in poor health and moody. "Always Carmen—possibly now and then Marguerite or Santuzza—but the American public will not hear me in other *rôles*. Abroad I sing everything. I must stay there or I will lose my repertoire."

"But the public must have 'Carmen.' Who will be our Carmen?" asked Planky.

"Who?" repeated the prima donna. "Signora—if she will stop going around behind the scenes singing to herself and sing out, as if she were facing an audience."

"Signora?" echoed Planky, but more as if he were weighing the words than in surprise. As for Signora, who was present, she did not protest. She had sung the *rôle*,

every note of it, over and over again to herself. To sing it for an audience simply would mean to put on a Carmen costume and stand out on the stage. So when Caravé spoke, Signora's eyes flashed with delight.

All she said was "Planky, if you are Escamillo when I make my début, will you say to *me*, 'Now zey are going to see ze two most beautiful noses in ze company'?" Then she dashed out of the room laughing. But she ran upstairs to one of the dressing rooms that was unoccupied. Having closed the door, she stood in front of the long pier glass and began the "Seguidilla," letting out her voice so that it reverberated through the room, while she swayed gracefully to and fro and made all manner of coquettish gestures, accompanying these with expressive glances and bewitching smiles. Here was a girl, barely sixteen or seventeen, a lighthearted, elfish creature yet who, through the unconscious exercise of an artistic temperament, that vibrated to her very finger tips, reproduced the alluring deviltry of Carmen.

But it seemed as if the idea that there was a great prima donna in Signora had occurred to no one about the opera house save Yudels and Caravé. For one of the first things the manager did, after it was settled that Caravé was not coming back, was to make an engagement by cable with a prima donna who had made a great success with Carmen in Paris and London. With the next season not only was this prima donna in the company but there was another important addition. For a long time Jean had been limiting his appearances more and more to Wagner *rôles* and the heavier heroic ones in the general repertoire, like Raoul. He now announced definitely that he would eliminate a number of *rôles* from his repertoire, among them Don Jose in "Carmen."

For this reason another tenor, and a good one, had to be engaged to take the *rôles* which Jean had discarded. Therefore there were two strangers in the company when it came together the following season,—the new prima donna and the new tenor. Signora

liked neither of them. The woman tried to disguise her nervousness over succeeding a prima donna of Caravé's great popularity by an assumed air of conviction that her own performances, especially of Carmen, would cause that singer to be completely forgotten. As for the tenor there was no *assumed* air of conviction about him. If ever a man was certain that he was "the greatest yet" it was M. Varu. Jean was his special aversion. He lost no opportunity to intimate that that singer was greatly overestimated in this country. "He can bark or snort through a Wagner night," he once confided to Signora. "But wait till they hear me in real opera. I am a real tenor. He is a baritone whose voice has been screwed up. Bah!"

Undeniably he was a handsome man. Born on the border of Spain he had a smooth, olive skin, dark hair, large, expressive brown eyes, gleaming teeth and a tall, lithe, responsive figure. Yet Signora disliked him. Toward the new prima donna her feelings were passive. But M. Varu

she positively disliked. It was because of his jealousy of Jean, who was one of her dear friends, and, even more, because he seemed to have taken a tremendous fancy to her.

"Why is it," she asked Planky, "that he always is hanging about me and telling me how pretty I look, when I am angry at him and my eyes flash?"

"Come, come, Signora," Planky would say. "You no longer are a child. You know that he is in love with you. It was love at first sight too."

"Then when a man makes a nuisance of himself, he is in love? So that is love. I am glad to find out what love really is."

"*Really* is?"

"Yes *really* is. Do you know when I sing 'I love you,' all kinds of strange feelings move me; but when I say 'I love you' it is just 'I love you'—three words with no meaning at all. What is 'I love you' without the music to it? Nothing. Do you know, Planky, if I were singing Carmen on the stage I would have all her feelings.

I would be so madly in love with Escamillo —even if you were not in the *rôle*, Planky" (this with delicious coquetry) "that Don Jose's jealousy would seem perfectly natural. But once off the stage, I would simply be Signora again. No one can make anything but Signora of me, except when on the stage, and then I would become whatever character I happened to be in. What is done on the stage would be real to me. The stage is real. It is what happens off the stage that is unreal."

Planky thought a moment. "Signora," he said, "you are a true child of the theatre. But," he added jestingly, "if ever you become a prima donna, don't ever sing in 'Carmen' with Varu. For if he sees how desperately in love you are with Escamillo he will kill you."

"I am not dreaming of becoming a prima donna," said Signora. "And yet, Planky," she continued frankly and without a trace of egotism, "do you know it seems as if it would be easy for me. All I would have to do would be to step out on the stage and

sing. I sing most of the time, anyhow, and what difference does it make where I sing? The only thing I'm afraid of is that if I once get on the stage, I won't give any one else a chance, that I'll want to sing through the whole opera—soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, bass, chorus and all. I know all the operas from beginning to end. But here I am rattling on and there isn't a chance of my becoming a prima donna. I'm only Signora. There are too many of them now; at all events there is one too many right in this company. Then you know, Planky, I haven't a beautiful nose and I couldn't think of singing Carmen to your Toreador and not have you say as we went on 'Now zey are going to see ze two most beautiful noses in ze company.'"

Planky looked at her for the first time, it seemed to her, seriously. "I will say it, Signora, if you will say 'I love you' to me, and have it mean more than 'just three words.'"

But even before he had finished Signora had half flitted, half floated away. As she reached the wings she turned. He was

following her with a curious look—half amused, half sad. A sudden impulse, a wholly new one, came over her. She felt like rushing back, jumping up and throwing her arms around his neck. She hesitated. For the first time in her life she checked an impulse. A roguish finger-shake, an elfish glance, and she vanished behind the wings into one of the dressing rooms.

"I 'm only Signora," she had said in self-deprecation. Yet her opportunity was to come sooner than she or any one else, for that matter, had any idea of. 'The new prima donna made her début as Carmen. It was barely more than a *succés d'estime.* The applause always came from the same few spots in the house, something which means "paper" and a small personal claque. In fact compared with the tumult which had attended Madame Caravé's Carmen début, and the ovation always accorded her, the new prima donna made a distinct failure. If, however, she was aware of that fact nothing in her bearing indicated it. One would have imagined from her air of

assurance that she had made a brilliant success.

Her début had been on Monday and, as was customary, a repetition of the performance had been billed for Friday. Every one supposed that, after such a fiasco, she would beg off and that some other opera would be substituted. But Friday came and no change. She had even asked for and been granted an extra rehearsal for certain scenes on Thursday. All day Friday the manager sat in his office waiting for the note which would tell him that she was "indisposed" and would be unable to appear that evening. He was prepared to hang up in the lobby the customary notice that "owing to the sudden indisposition of Mme—— the management had been compelled to change the opera from 'Carmen' to——." But noon came and four o'clock and six—and no note. It was then too late to have changed the bill, in any event, so the manager went out for a bite. He really began to have a feeling of admiration for the prima donna. Where another would have

packed her trunks and sailed for Europe by the next steamer she was going to stay and face an unfavorably disposed audience again.

It was drawing near the time for the performance. Planky and Varu and the other principals already were in their dressing-rooms. They could be heard trying snatches of their *rôles*. For half an hour members of the chorus had been crossing the stage on the way to the dressing-rooms, and many of them, already in their gay toggery, were chatting in the wings. The boss carpenter was testing the bridge, over which Carmen makes her entrance, to make sure that it was firmly set up and would not begin to wobble—which stone bridges should not do. The orchestra was arriving. In fact, a double bass player, one of whose heavy strings had broken, was in his place putting on a new one, and you could hear the deep growl of the instrument as he drew his bow across it. But the prima donna had not arrived. The costumes were hanging or spread out in her dressing-room, but neither she nor her maid were there.

It was time for the doors at the front of the house to open. Still no prima donna. Suddenly the manager appeared. It was evident he was furious. In his hand he held a letter. "Look!" the word came from between his teeth as he held it up to Planky. Others gathered around. They knew without reading what was the matter. The prima donna had held on till the last moment, then her spirit had given out. It was the usual physician's certificate, but really she had lost heart. It meant the worst thing that can happen to a manager, a "dark house"—turning an audience away and having no performance. As all realized this, there was a sudden silence. At that moment a clear, strong voice was heard singing:

"Près des remparts de Seville."

The manager started. It was so like Caravé. It sounded as if she were singing over the Seguidilla before "going on."

"Signora!" exclaimed Planky.

"Signora!" echoed the chorus.

"Signora?" queried the manager, under

his breath. Just then Signora came on. As usual on Carmen nights she had donned her Carmen costume. It seemed as if she were the prima donna—all ready to go on. She looked at the people who were eyeing her so expectantly. Planky explained: "Signora!" he said. "You know Carmen. You can sing it. Remember what Caravé said. Will you?"

"Why not? I have sung it since I was a baby."

The manager said nothing. He was accustomed to taking chances, and, after all, was this such a great one? The group dispersed to their places, the orchestra began tuning up. Signora stood in the wings; Varu came up to her. He was excited.

"It is the great moment of your life, Signora. You are to sing with me. I will help make you famous, for you will have the greatest Don Jose to act with you. Say you love me, Signora. Bah! when I think of the women who adore me—countesses, princesses—queens—and I am to allow myself to be put off by you, a child who

does not know its own mind? You think you are in love with Planky." (He laughed sardonically.) "In love with a basso when you can have a tenor and a great tenor at that. You shrink from me?" (His eyes flashed with rage.) "You must love me, you shall love me, and to-night, or—" His hand went to his dagger hilt.

Signora heard Planky in another part of the wings trying a few bars of the Toreador song which the orchestra was playing in the overture. She ran up to him, and, standing beside him, thrust her little hand in his big palm. He seemed to her like a protector. She felt as if she needed one. He construed her action as a mark of gratitude at his having suggested her to the manager, or as evidence of a slight feeling of timidity now that she really was to confront an audience, and he beamed down upon her reassuringly from his height.

The orchestra nearly had finished the short overture. She heard the buzzer, the electric signal, for the curtain. It had a new significance for her. As the curtain

rose, and, unseen herself, she had a view of part of the house, she remembered a lot of trivial things about some of the people in the boxes which had been told her by the American prima donna, who was quite a society pet. There sat the millionaire, who when his daughter became engaged to an English lord, told the reporters who called to see him about it, that so long as his daughter was bound to marry a foreign nobleman he was glad he was to have a son-in-law whom he could swear at in his own language. In the next box was the dowager, of whom people said that she was "not so bad as she was *painted*," with much emphasis on painted. She was with one of the upstart leaders of the four-hundred who was so ill-educated that, after purchasing some curtains, she told a friend that she had been "*so busy* all day buying the port cochères for her parlor."

How much longer Signora would have allowed her eyes to wander along the box tier there is no knowing. She was recalled by Planky. The call boy was coming to

warn her of her cue. She withdrew her hand from Planky's and hurried to the spot from which she was to make her entrance over the bridge. She heard the factory bell; the tenors, "La cloche est sonnée" (the bell is striking); the basses, "Mais nous ne voyons pas la Carmencita" (but why do we not see Carmen?). A touch from Planky. She was on the bridge, waving her fan and laughing; now halfway across it—and the house applauding.

XIII

YES—applauding. For this audience though, like all audiences when a change is announced in an important member of the cast, disappointed and determined to sulk, recognized almost the instant Signora came over the bridge with a saucy toss of the head and waving a red poppy in the hand, that here was a successor to Caravé. The litheness, the unconscious grace, were apparent, and the magnetism which is inseparable from real artistic temperament—qualities in her which for years had captivated every one behind the scenes—had in a few moments communicated themselves to the "front of the house." Planky stood in the wings and marvelled. Varu was devouring her with his eyes. Not a motion did he lose as, flirting with

her fan, and with glances full of witchery at him, she sang the "Habanera," taking a high note which she allowed to die away without robbing it of its sensuous beauty, then tripping away from the crowd to where Don Jose sat, pressing an acacia flower, suddenly and wholly unexpectedly, tightly upon his lips, letting it drop at his feet, and then lightly running away with a rippling laugh into the cigarette factory. It was all done with inimitable coquetry. The audience was in a ferment of enthusiasm. And later after the quarrel scene and her arrest—the angry stamp of the foot; the nonchalance with which she powdered her face when told she was to go to prison; her bravado air as she sang the "tra la la la"; her mocking, military step as she followed Don Jose; the enchanting archness and insinuating witchery of the "Seguidilla" —when the curtain fell she had scored a triumph such as no one before her except Caravé had done.

Yet she was not an imitation of Caravé. There were innumerable telling bits of

stage "business" which no one had used before. Every one behind the scenes was in ecstasy, except she herself. She took it all very quietly. "I have been singing it for years. I should know it." Then she broke away from the crowd and went to her dressing-room, but not until Planky had raised her hand to his lips and kissed it, and she had, with a laugh, refused the same favor to Varu. She did not see the look of hatred he gave Planky, as if he were Don Jose, and Planky the Toreador, in real life.

Everything went beautifully in the next two acts and the enthusiasm of the audience increased with every scene. Signora's magnetism and abandon seemed contagious. It pervaded the whole performance. Planky never had sung the famous "Toreador, en garde!" so well. He appeared keyed up by a desire to give every possible brilliance to Signora's début.

Varu also outdid himself and near the end of the third act, when Don Jose and Escamillo have the knife duel, which Carmen breaks off, he made such a savage

onslaught that it seemed to require all of Planky's skill to parry his thrusts and escape a real injury.

"Signora," said Planky after they came back from acknowledging many times the outburst of enthusiasm which followed the falling of the curtain, "have a care. Varu meant to kill me. I am sure of it. He is mad with jealousy. I will watch out for you, but have a care yourself!" Signora laughed. "'Killed on the night of her début'—wouldn't it sound romantic?"

"It would be terrible!" Then with a depth of feeling she had never heard from him, save when he sang, Planky exclaimed, "It would make me wretched for life!"

"Planky," she said with a tantalizing smile, "I believe you really are growing fond of me. You must have discovered that I, too, have a beautiful nose!" Then she took her station in the wings to be ready for going on.

Everything seemed confusion on the stage, yet everything was proceeding by method. Several "grips" were taking away

the steps by which Michaela had ascended to the "runway" over which she had made her entrance. Others were folding up rocks and running them off; still others carrying off trees. There was a general upheaval of nature. Into the place where a rocky back-ground had been a few minutes before, there descended a small drop showing the bull-fight arena and an audience of painted faces. Some ten feet in front of this descended another drop showing the front wall of the arena with large, heavy, wooden practical doors. The street scene, the Plaza del Toro, with the orange vendor's stand on the right, extended from this to the footlights. In the wings the "super captain," was giving the soldiers an extra rehearsal in their evolutions. Property men were putting the trappings on horses and mules. Others in the opposite wings were putting baskets filled with sawdust in place to fool the animals and lure them quickly across the stage. The street cloth was run over the stage floor.

The stage manager clapped his hands.

The prompter straightened up in his box, the conductor dove into the little hole that led down to the orchestra, the electrician gave his last orders—"get a little amber in your tops—they're jumping—now let go with your borders!" The street people—vendors, citizens, gendarmes—went on. "Buzz-buzz-buzz,"—up went the curtain.

Then came the ballet with its tambourines and castanets. The line formed a semicircle by interlocking arms over shoulders and, swaying to and fro, with the première pirouetting in front, danced down to the footlights. Then a rush of all toward one of the wings and there entered the procession to the arena, the doors of which swung open.

First came the Alguacil on horseback, then the chulos, bearing the colors. Cries from the crowd greeted the banderilleros dressed in bespangled green and waving crimson cloths. Shouts of "The picadors with those pointed lances!"—"The cuadrilla of toreros." A tremendous shout and

"Falling dead at the very doors just as they swung open to let out the crowd shouting for Escamillo"

Escamillo entered with Carmen. "Vive Escamillo! Bravo! Bravo!" Last of all the Alcade and his guards.

The crowd entered the arena. The doors were closed. The street was deserted save for Carmen, who there awaited the issue of the bull-fight, and Don Jose, who had slunk in almost at the last.

Behind the drop representing the front of the arena the bull-fight was supposed to be in progress. The opera, it will be remembered, reaches its climax as Carmen, hearing Escamillo acclaimed victor, rushes toward the arena, pursued by Don Jose, who, as she reaches the entrance, overtakes her and drives his dagger into her back, she falling at the very doors just as they swing open to let out the crowd shouting for Escamillo, who comes forward to find the woman he expected to greet him lying dead at his feet.

Inside the arena, however, there is no charging bull. A stage hand in his shirt sleeves sits on a box holding in his hand a string attached to the doors so that he can

pull them open at the critical moment. This evening, however, Planky made him get up and took his place. He was anxious for Signora. He dreaded the final scene, and wanted to be where he could watch part of the stage through the crack between the doors.

The ballet had dashed off to their dressing rooms. One of the "props" gathered in the crimson cloths of the toreros, and the lances of the picadors, and carried them off. The horses and mules were standing contentedly off in the wings among the rocks, houses, bridges and runways that had been shoved into a corner from the previous acts. On an empty box stood a man directing the rays of an electric calcium on to the arena drop so that, when the doors swung open, it would show up the painted audience well, and give an air of verisimilitude to a bald and unconvincing falsehood. Near him, in street clothes and with hats tipped in various askews stood the brass band, which was to play the flourishes when Escamillo is supposed to enter the arena and despatch

the bull. A mule, in search of oats, poked his nose into the bell of one of the French horns. The player thrust the instrument at the beast's head and it went back to its place among the rocks. Soldiers were sitting around on stray scenic steps, and the chorus was standing about in small groups.

Michaela, who, having nothing to do after the third act, had dressed to go home, crossed through the arena on her way to the street. Seeing Planky sitting on the box holding the doorstring in his hand, she was about playfully to knock his hat off his head, when a realistic outcry from Carmen arrested her attention. As she listened she could almost feel the emotional tension to which the audience had been worked up. Evidently, the scene was being carried out with wonderful dramatic force.

She spoke to Planky, but he did not seem to hear her. He was winding the torero's crimson cloth in heavy folds around his left arm. He had heard a note of real terror in Signora's outcry. He knew that she had

become aware of her danger, but he also knew that the time for him to act had not yet come. Above all, whatever happened, the scene must not be spoiled. His artistic instincts forbade that.

Signora could at any moment escape into the wings, run around to the arena, and be safe with him. But he knew she would not, for that would spoil the scene—and she, too, was an artist. Then there was Varu. He intended to kill her. Of that Planky was sure. But there was no danger that he would attempt it until the moment called for in the opera, when Carmen reached the door of the arena. They all were artists, all governed by the theatrical instinct, and not one of them would go out of "character" till the proper climax was reached.

It was coming. The band broke in. The crowd in the arena shouted. Planky heard Signora's and Varu's footsteps as she rushed for the doors, with him in hot pursuit. "Planky! Planky!" he heard her call beneath her breath. He saw the savage look in Varu's eyes. He saw him raise the knife.

In a moment it would be buried to the hilt in Signora's back.

The time to open wide the doors had not yet come. But Planky made a slight crevice between them and, as the knife flashed through the air on its fatal errand, he thrust out his arm and caught the point on the crimson cloak. Varu was between him and the audience. They did not see what was done. He felt the force of the madman's blow. Then he heard Signora's agonized shriek—a shriek which so thrilled the audience that, as Planky pulled the string and the doors swung back, allowing the crowd to surge out, the whole house burst into an uproar of applause. Signora had been saved—and so had the scene.

Down came the curtain. Varu slunk away. (He took the next steamer for Europe, much to the surprise of the opera public, which never knew why.) Planky raised Signora from the floor. She looked at him in a dazed, frightened way, as if she hardly could realize that she was out of danger. Her cry had been real. It had been a call to him and he had responded.

Beyond the curtain the house was in a tumult. Signora seemed so weak, Planky almost had to drag her through the proscenium door. Men were applauding, women waving their kerchiefs and wraps and throwing flowers. A crowd gathered in "crank's alley," the space just in front of the proscenium arch, and shouted every time Planky and Signora passed in and out, which was many times. But Plankey almost had to drag her, for she clung to him as if she would drop without his support.

At last the house lights were ordered down and the crowd gradually dispersed. Planky gathered the girl in his arms and carried her to her dressing room where he placed her on a couch. She lay there, her eyes closed. He knelt beside her.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Signora," he asked. Slowly she opened her eyes.

"Planky!" she said, "dear Planky! would you still like me to say 'I love you' and not have it sound just like three words?" He answered with his eyes. Signora put her

arms around his neck. "I love you, I love you, I love you!" she said with a depth of feeling that thrilled him with happiness.

There were sounds near the door. They looked up. There were the rest of the company waiting to congratulate Signora on her triumph. But they had taken in the situation and were beaming all over with joy. Signora saw them. Drawing back a little and giving Planky a roguish smile, she said:—

"Now, Planky, zey are going to see ze two most beautiful noses in ze company!"

" Pulleys and cleats and rope enough up there for a full-rigged ship "